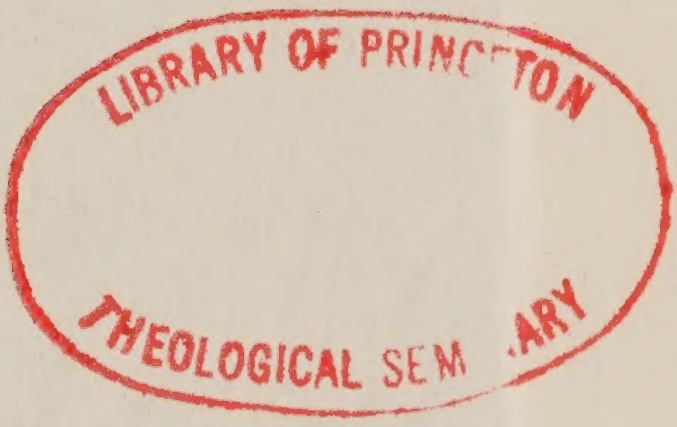


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THE

# NATURE AND INSTRUMENT

OF

# REGENERATION.

The kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground, . . . . . and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.—Mark iv. 26, 27.

BY C. WEBSTER,

*Pastor of the First Associate Presbyterian Congregation, Philadelphia.*

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# PREFACE.

THIS little book is presented to the Christian public from no desire of authorship. It is the result of a call in the providence of God, which the writer had no liberty to disobey.

The doctrines of Pelagians and semi-Pelagians on the one hand, and the denial of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration on the other, although *apparently* opposites, will be seen, by a perusal of these pages, to flow spontaneously from the same radical error, namely,—an undue exaltation of the natural man's ability of will.

The reader will find no tincture, either of party spirit or denominational pride; but an humble inquiry into that great change which passes upon all those who are redeemed from among men, before their admission into the presence and enjoyment of God. More than a hundred of the best authors, to which the

writer could obtain access, have been consulted, compared with the scriptures, and with each other. The result of this laborious research is here brought to view within a narrow compass, in the hope of promoting, through the blessing of God, the spiritual interest of such as have neither the means nor leisure for extended research.

Religious controversy, having its origin in the imperfection of human nature, is always attended with *present* evil; but all experience demonstrates that its ultimate effects have generally proved beneficial. The present work is, in a great measure, necessarily controversial; but the author has laboured to avoid, as much as possible, the spirit of mere controversy; as truth, and only truth, has been uniformly the object of his ardent pursuit.

A few individuals are found, perhaps, in every community, who handle the word of God as they would a ball in a game of cricket, merely to display their dexterity, or obtain a victory. This class of persons may be discovered by their misrepresentations of the obvious meaning of others; by their carping at

words; by their denials or perversions of scripture; and by their laboured arguments in defence of error. The author desires no participation with such persons in their folly.

The great importance, nay indispensable necessity of a clear and simple style, in such a discussion as the present, has been kept constantly in view. The "footsteps of the flock" of God have been attentively considered. No sentiment has been advanced, touching the essentials of true religion, which is not supported by the suffrages of the learned and pious in all ages, who have committed their views to writing for the benefit of their fellow men, and "who being dead, yet speak."

It will be perceived that an accurate knowledge of the *nature* of regeneration is essential to a correct understanding of the means by which it is effected.

Several new errors, which have been vented since Charnock wrote, are here met and refuted. Dr. Witherspoon's standard work on the subject, though of more recent date, is "A Practical Treatise," exhibiting more directly the *evidences*, than the *nature* of the change. It is, however, believed the reader might derive

great benefit by a perusal of the authors just named in connexion with this treatise.

In some respects, it is thought the doctrine of regeneration is presented in a more clear light than in any previous single publication. Be this, however, as it may, the author is confident no one can sustain any loss by an attentive perusal of the work.

The learned, before they condemn the minute explanation of some things, which are familiar to them, are requested to reflect, that these things are not so obvious to the generality of readers, as the great prevalence of error clearly demonstrates.

For the plan of the work, the reader is referred to the table of contents.

It is believed the interests of the Christian church demand this publication. It treats of a change in the souls of men, which lies far beyond those regions that bound the researches of philosophy: and as the knowledge of this change can be derived only from divine revelation, so its nature can be accurately understood only by those happy souls upon whom it has been effected, by means of that revelation.

Read, ponder, believe, and be saved.

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# PART I.

## THE NATURE OF REGENERATION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STATEMENT OF ERRORS.

I. As it would be impossible for the reader to see the bearing and force of many remarks in the following pages, without a knowledge of the principal errors which have been broached upon the subject of Regeneration, particular attention is called in the outset to the most prominent.

1. The radical error of the Arminians, is, that the understanding alone needs to be enlightened:—

"What we do really believe to be our chief good, will be chosen; and what we apprehend to be the worst of evils, will, whilst we do continue under that conviction, be refused by us. It, therefore, can

be only requisite, in order to these ends, that the good Spirit should so *illumine our understandings*, that we attending to and considering what lies before us, should apprehend and be convinced of our duty."*

"We know if an object be viewed as good by our understanding the will chooses it."†

2. The modern Hopkinsians maintain that depravity is limited to the will:—

"That man possesses, since the fall, the powers of agency requisite to moral obligation, *on the ground of the possibility of obedience*, is a matter of notoriety. . . . . Choice, without the possibility of other or contrary choice, is the immemorial doctrine of fatalism. . . . . The doctrine of the *natural ability of choice, commensurate with obligation*, has been, and is, the received doctrine of the universal orthodox church, from the primitive age down to this day."‡

"Sin and holiness are predicable of nothing but *moral actions*."§

"Sin is a wrong choice, or volition. Holiness is its opposite; a right choice or volition. Nothing else is sin; nothing else is holiness."‖

"The understanding, considered as distinct from the will, is not capable of moral depravity."¶

* Whitby.

† Inquiro in the Religious Monitor, Vol. 18, p. 289.

‡ Beecher's Views in Theology, pp. 30, 31, 35, 47.

§ Hopkins, Vol. 1. p. 129.

‖ Spring's Disquisitions, p. 16.

¶ Hopkins, Vol. 1. p. 532.

3. Many from Pelagius to the present day teach that God only *assists* us by the word, in the production of that change, which takes place in regeneration. See Pelagius as quoted by Turretine.

4. A large number of theologians in different denominations still maintain the doctrine, that all the Holy Spirit does in regenerating sinners, is to make them willing to do that which they were really able to do before:—

"As God requires men to make to themselves a new heart, on pain of eternal death, it is the strongest possible evidence that they are able to do it. . . . . The reason why God cannot sin, is not because he is naturally unable to sin, nor because selfishness in him would not be sin. But it is said he cannot sin, because he is voluntarily holy, infinitely disposed not to sin. . . . . A change of heart, then, consists in changing the controlling preference of the mind in regard to the end of pursuit."*

"It is going altogether beyond the analogy in the case, to assert that there is in regeneration the injection, infusion, or implantation, or creation of a new principle of spiritual life."†

"The Bible knows no instantaneous regeneration."‡

* Finney. † Duffield. ‡ Dr. Gilbert.

5. The Hopkinsians teach, that, "in regeneration, conversion and sanctification, the Holy Spirit operates by his power *immediately*, and *without* means, upon the heart."*

"Men are *not* regenerated by light or the word of God."†

6. New school divines teach that it is effected "by the influence of truth presented to the mind, and in no other way."‡

In regeneration "the sinner is as *active* as in any subsequent act of obedience."§

"The part which the Holy Spirit performs in the work, is, to present truth powerfully before the mind in the form of motives, like an advocate arguing a cause before a jury; or as one man influences and persuades another in the common affairs of life; though with infinitely greater skill and force than can be employed by any human agent. His attention is thus arrested—he resolves in his mind the points at issue —and at length being convinced where his true interest lies, he is prevailed upon by the moral suasion of the Spirit, to change the governing purpose or preference of his mind, and to choose God as his Supreme portion."‖

* Emmons, Vol. 2. p. 33. Strong, pp. 120, 173.
† Hop. Vol. 1. p. 536. ‡ Gilbert.
§ Emmons, p. 337. ‖ Old and New Theology, p. 173.

These authorities could be greatly extended, were it judged necessary.

7. A recent writer, however, goes beyond any of his predecessors in the denial of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration:—

"It can and should be understood by us how the word operates as an instrument in renewing the soul. . . . . A great and supernatural change is effected prior to the operation of the word. . . . . The word does not operate upon the soul in the very act of regeneration. . . . . If the word operate, the soul must act. It is impossible, we apprehend, to conceive of any instrumental efficiency in the word, without supposing a corresponding activity in the soul. . . . . A second act necessarily supposes a first, and because the object must be apprehended by the faculty, it requires that the faculty itself be rightly disposed antecedently to the reception of it. . . . . The word is instrumental in the production of the creature viewed as in a state of perfect formation, which is not the case until it has seen the light, and put forth incipient acts. . . . . The connexion between the word and regeneration, is not that connexion which there is between an instrumental cause and its effect, but a connexion of institution. . . . . The doctrine of the instrumentality of the word strengthens Pelagianism.

. . . . James i. 18, says nothing about a new heart, it only has the *appearance* of being on the subject."*

The scriptures "do not teach the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration." There is no adaptation in the word to operate instrumentally upon the soul, nor any adaptation in the faculties of the soul to be operated upon by the word, in the hand of the Spirit. Regeneration is not the effect of the operation of the word in the hand of the Spirit:—Because, 1. The soul is dead in sins: 2. Regeneration is called a creation: 3. It is effected by the *direct* and *immediate* influence of the Spirit.†

II. In these conflicting sentiments, all equally contrary to the testimony of revealed truth, may be readily traced the following errors, either expressed or necessarily implied:—

1. The depravity of man is not total.

2. Depravity is limited to the understanding.

3. Depravity is limited to the will.

4. Regeneration is merely a change of purpose, or choice of the will.

* Religious Monitor, Vol. 18, Numbers for July and December 1841; also, Evangelical Repository, Vol. 1. Number for September, 1842.

† Evangelical Repository, Vol. 1. Number for September, 1842.

5. No spiritual life is infused; no new moral power communicated.

6. It is effected by the influence of truth, and in no other way.

7. It is effected without any means whatever.

8. God's command to sinners to make to themselves a new heart, proves their ability to obey.

9. If the Holy Spirit employ "the word of truth" in regeneration, it proves the sinner's ability to make a right use of the word. "If the word operate, the soul must act."

10. Regeneration is not an instantaneous act.

III. Such, then, are the legitimate fruits of human depravity. These prevalent errors, pernicious, as they are plausible to the biassed reasonings of the natural man, are perfectly congenial to that alienation of mind from God, that leads men to prefer "the words which man's wisdom teaches," to "the words which the Holy Ghost teaches." Consequently, they are the result, not of the Spirit's dictation, but of a human philosophy. "In Mr. Finney's two sermons, on the duty of sinners to change

their own hearts, he uses the words philosophy, philosophical, unphilosophical, &c., at least fourteen times. He tells us about 'the philosophy of conversion,' 'the philosophy of self-examination,' and 'the philosophy of special efforts to promote revivals of religion.' Every step in the change is brought to the test of philosophy; and the failure of the sinner to submit to God, is ascribed in one instance to his not understanding the philosophy of the process."* In like manner, those who deny the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, are philosophers. One is afraid of "reasoning in a circle;" another is unable to make the doctrine square with his philosophy. He cannot understand *how* the word operates. This *should* be understood; and if it cannot be understood, it should not be believed. Thus men are too philosophical to believe mysteries.

Those who deny the infusion of spiritual life in regeneration by the immediate action of divine power, unwittingly adopt the religion of nature, which is seen in the lives of the mass of mankind; but more strikingly exhi-

* Old and New Theology, p. 224.

bited through those horrid superstitions, which form the constituent elements of Popery and Paganism. The tendency of this denial is towards the Atheism of the materialist, which excludes the power of God, not only from the sustentation and government, but also from the creation of the world. But, on the other hand, a denial of the instrumentality of the word in the production of this great change, is one step towards that independency of Deism, which rejects the means of grace. Its advocates are unconsciously rushing into an alliance with those sons of pride who form an imaginary God, to whom they dictate the laws by which he shall govern his creatures.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE STATE OF THE QUESTION.

I. Depravity is the source of that radical error,—THE ABILITY OF THE NATURAL MAN'S WILL,—from which the false and clashing sentiments quoted in the preceding chapter shoot up spontaneously. But this error appears to be fostered in the church, by the want of a due consideration of the difference between the *present* and *primitive* state of man; applying to his fallen state arguments which are applicable only to a state of innocence. It is this, which not only clothes error in its plausible garb, but also gives it such amazing success in the world. In his primitive state man was perfectly righteous and holy: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright." Eccles. vii. 29. He had a perfect knowledge of the divine will respecting himself; for the law of God was written upon his heart, Rom. ii. 15. He was able to obey all that the law required; for he was created in the image of God, Gen. i. 27. Thus he was fully capable of the knowledge, love, service, and enjoyment of God his Maker.

From this holy and blessed state he fell by transgression: "He hath sought out many inventions," Eccles. vii. 29. His fall brought him into a state of guilt and wretchedness from which he has no more power to deliver himself, than the homicide has power to call into life the victim of his unbridled passion. "For by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men; for that all have sinned," Rom. v. 12. How deplorable then is the present state of the human race! How great the delusion of those who so inconsiderately apply facts and reasoning to LOST man which can only be predicated of man in his primitive state! For although the fall did, indeed, change man's *relation* to his Maker, it did not and could not change either the character of God or the claims of his law, which always did and always must require men to "Love God with all their heart, and soul, and mind and strength, and their neighbour as themselves." A contrary supposition implies that God is mutable, and will permit the creature to abrogate his law.

II. But it is maintained by our opponents, that man, in his fallen state, possesses natural

ability of will to comply with the requirements of the divine law. Consequently, that regeneration can be nothing more than a "change of the governing purpose or preference of the mind, which is effected by the presentation of motives drawn from the word." The orthodox maintain, that, "although the natural power of understanding and willing remains always in it, (the mind,) nevertheless, the moral habit, or disposition of judging and willing rightly, has been so destroyed, that it can no longer be moved to the upright exercise of itself by the presentation (appulsum) of the object, as was the case in the natural order and instituted state of man, unless the faculty be first renewed."* Hence they hold, that a *supernatural*† change must pass upon all the faculties of the soul, equivalent to a new creation, or resurrection from the dead: that such a change is neces-

* Licet semper in ea [anima] remanserit potentia naturalis intelligendi et volendi; habitus tamen seu dispositio moralis bene judicandi et volendi ita intercederit; ut non possit amplius moveri ad rectum sui exercitum per appulsum objecti; ut fieri solebat in ordine naturali, et statu hominis institutio, nisi facultas ipsa prius renovetur. —*Turretine*, Tom. II., p. 574.

† Not inconsistent with the natural faculties, but *above* their ability.

sary, because, in respect to the right performance, from right motives, of any duty towards God, or men, the depravity of soul in the natural man is TOTAL.

III. A few out of the many passages of scripture, that might be adduced to prove this total depravity of natural men, and the radical change which is effected in regeneration, by the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit, are here selected as the basis of the present discussion.

1. In respect to the *understanding*. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he *know* them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14. "There is none that understandeth," Rom. iii. 11. "Having the understanding darkened," Eph. iv. 18. "They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven images," Isaiah xlv. 20. "To do good they have no knowledge," Jer. iv. 22. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," Eph. v. 8. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened," Eph. i. 18. "Then opened he their understanding," Luke xxiv. 45. "Whose heart the Lord opened," Acts xvi. 14. "Renewed in knowledge," Col.

iii. 10. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. In respect to the *will*. "They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," Job xxi. 14. "We will not have this man to reign over us," Luke xix. 14. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," John v. 40. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," Psalm cx. 3.

3. In respect to the *affections*. "How long will ye hate knowledge?" Prov. i. 22. "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go," Jer. ii. 25. "They have loved to wander," Jer. xiv. 10. "Sensual," Jude 19. "Earthly, sensual, devilish," James iii. 15. "Herein is love, NOT that we loved God," &c., 1 John iv. 10.

4. In respect to the *conscience*. "Even their conscience defiled," Tit. i. 15. "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," Heb. x. 22.

5. In regard to the desperate wickedness, yea, *total depravity*, of the whole soul, in all its

faculties and operations. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Rom. viii. 7. "Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually," Gen. vi. 5. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," Jer. xvii. 9. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it," Is. i. 5, 6.

6. In reference to the natural man's *inability*. Although necessarily to be inferred from the forecited passages, still it is also taught in the most explicit language. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil," Jer. xiii. 23. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. ii. 1. "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him," John vi. 44. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit," Mat. vii. 18. "The hour is coming, and NOW IS, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God," John v. 25. These, and many similar scriptures, illustrate and give pungency to the words of our Lord:—

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do," John viii. 44.

7. The same truth is still farther confirmed, by a consideration of those passages of scripture in which God declares the work of changing a sinner's heart to be his own prerogative. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live for ever," Deut. xxx. 6. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes," Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," Jer. xxxi. 33. Hence the declaration of our Lord, (Matt. xv. 13,) "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."

Do these solemn declarations of the Holy Ghost mean only the natural man's own

change of purpose? Do they mean no more than that God will *assist* and *succeed* his endeavours? Do they imply *ability* of will commensurate with the divine command,—"Make you a new heart?" Surely, no candid person, solicitous for his own eternal welfare, will maintain the affirmative to any of these questions.

IV. The whole human race are justly chargeable with self-destruction. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself," Hosea xiii. 9. Man has lifted his hand against his own life. Death entered the world by the sin of man, Rom. v. 12. He is the author of his own misery. In this respect he differs from all the other creatures of God, excepting only the devils. "Ye are of your father the devil." Nor is it possible for men to throw the responsibility of their guilt, either upon the secret providence of God, or the instrumentality of others. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands," Ps. ix. 16. Some of this lost race, God in mercy and wisdom determined to save; to remove their guilt through the satisfaction of a surety; and to renew their nature by his

power. In reference to the FIRST exercise of Almighty power in accomplishing this renovation of nature, the present inquiry has been instituted.

V. It is necessary, in a subject like this, to define as accurately as possible such terms as are liable to misapprehension. By "faculty" is intended an inherent mental power, essential to the being and identity of the soul. By the phrase "new moral nature," the *principle* of the new birth is intended, in opposition to the Pelagian "change of purpose," and by way of distinction from the *exercises* of the renewed soul. Consequently it will be seen that by "new moral nature" is intended *subjection*, or conformity to the divine law, together with the capacity for active, and sincere, though it may be still far from perfect obedience to that law. It is used interchangeably with "spiritual life," to prevent the too frequent recurrence of the same phrase. The *carnal mind* of the natural man is *not subject* to the divine law, (Rom. viii. 7,) "neither indeed can be." But the mind of the renewed man is in a state, both of passive and active subjection to the law, which implies a new moral nature and capacity.

The term "capacity," which is sometimes used by sound writers, is intended, when applied to the new-born soul, to express the kind and degree of its ability to act. But when applied to the soul previously to, and IN the regenerating act, it denotes *passive power*, or simple suitableness. There was a passive power, or suitableness in the meal, in which the woman hid the leaven, to be made active by that leaven. There is a suitableness in the seed of certain plants, and in the earth, for the production of vegetable life, though both seed and earth should be frozen, and lie buried deep, beneath snow and ice. But it requires heat and moisture to produce that life. So it requires the action of the Spirit, both upon the soul, and upon the word, to produce spiritual life. But this figure would mislead us, if taken without limitation. For, although there is a native tendency in the word to regenerate, as in the seed to grow; yet there is no such tendency in the soul. Its influence is deadly upon all external means, when unaccompanied with a divine power. "Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower, does not explain the means by which the ground is

*made* good—this he has done in other places; but speaks of the effect of the seed, when falling where it is already good—in distinction from its unprofitableness, when uniting with the way-side, and the stony and thorny soil."* Consequently the words *adaptation* or *suitableness* have been selected to express the *passive power* of the soul to be operated upon by the word and Spirit of God, as less liable to misapprehension than the word "capable." Because it is apprehended this capability of the soul to be acted upon, in its natural state, of which orthodox writers speak, denotes nothing more than the simple adaptation or suitableness of its nature, as a rational creature and moral agent, to be the subject of the regenerating act.

The terms *physical* and *hyper-physical*, when applied to the change effected in regeneration, are exceedingly indefinite. If by *physical*, any change in the substance of the mental faculties be intended, then the term is to be rejected. If nothing more be intended than a change of the *moral qualities* of the soul, and of the *exercise* of its faculties, then we have

* Jay's Evening Exercises, p. 311.

nothing to object against retaining the word. The cause of truth, however, would suffer nothing from the loss of a word, which must necessarily lead the mind into error, or be understood in a sense different from its primary signification, which implies some change in a material substance. So, in regard to the term *hyperphysical*, if it be understood to express a change which violates the *substance* of the soul, or which in any way coerces the operation of its faculties, it is to be rejected. But if it be used to express the communication of a new exercise of mental power, (produced by the infusion of spiritual life into the soul,) which is *above*, but not *contrary* to the nature of the faculties; or if it be used to express a *moral* change *contrary* to the natural man, it should be retained. In this sense it is correct. Sound writers, so far as they have attached any definite meaning to these terms, evidently use them in the sense here explained. Any other signification would imply a charge against them of self-contradiction.

VI. Regeneration, then, neither confers any new, nor destroys any of the old faculties. "If by physical regeneration is meant a me-

chanical change in the substance of the soul, it forms no part of the old theology."* It rectifies the faculties; removes that moral turpitude, which paralyzed their right exercise, as effectually as though they had been annihilated. It is in vain then to plead for human ability by saying, "Not one of the powers of the mind, which constituted ability before the fall, have been obliterated by that event." For it was not only "the powers of the mind," which constituted ability before the fall, but also the moral character of those powers. Guilt extinguished the spiritual life, and introduced pollution. The impenetrable *film* of sin spread itself over the intellectual eye, rendering it incapable of discerning spiritual objects; while the filth of sin paralyzed all right moral exercises of the soul. Hence, it is not only, in respect to the guilt, but also in respect to the pollution of sin, that men have destroyed themselves: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Hosea xiii. 9. It would be no less unreasonable to look for the exercise of animal life, in the dead body of the suicide, than to suppose

* Old and New Theology, p. 187.

the natural man can make himself a new heart, merely because all his original powers of mind still remain. It is, also, equally vain to plead, that the commands of God imply commensurate ability in the natural man to obey. The assertion, that, "as God requires men to make to themselves a new heart, on pain of eternal death, it is the strongest possible evidence that they are able to do it," produces an involuntary shudder in the pious mind. It is the offspring of the father of all error; the impudent avowal of brazen-faced infidelity; and a most lamentable evidence of that inability which it so confidently denies. "The most that can be judged of commands and exhortations, in scripture, is this: They are representations of our *duty*, not of our *strength;* declarative of God's *authority* and right of dominion, and not of our *power* or ability. A command respects us as creatures: whether upright or fallen, it is equally obligatory on us. God hath the same claim to worship from us, and the same dominion over us, since, as before the fall."* This doctrine, then, that ability must be commensurate with

* Lime Street Lecture, p. 318.

the command of God, is applicable only to a state of innocence. In our present fallen state, it leads to the dreadful conclusion, that the creature has power to abolish the law of the Creator, and escape from his subjection to the divine government by transgression.

VII. Regeneration is not the *coercion* of the will. The choice of the will is both *free* and *necessary:* free from the impulsion of external agents; but necessary from its own nature. By a divine constitution every creature necessarily acts according to its nature, when not under restraint. Freedom of will in God consists, 1. In the power of decreeing to act, or not to act. 2. In the choice of some one course of procedure out of every possible variety that can come within the scope of infinite wisdom and Almighty power; provided always, that the particular course of procedure chosen, be consistent with the divine nature. God cannot deny his own essence—cannot command his creatures to have some other god before him. Here then is both freedom and necessity of will delightfully harmonizing; holding sweet concert in the being and operations of God. So with the soul of man. Its power of choice

is free; but controlled by its own nature and relations in the scale of being. In its fallen state it may incline to the choice of endless absurdities, to create a world, or convert itself into a brute. But its *efficient* choice of will is limited to things congruous to its nature, and within the compass of its power. In both these respects, the new birth lies far beyond the reach of a carnal mind. 1 Cor. ii. 14. "The moral disposition of the soul, as it respects both the will and understanding, has a governing influence upon the will in its moral actings; in all those actings which respect the supreme Lawgiver and his law, as to matters of sin and duty. The moral disposition lies not primarily in the understanding or in the will, considered as powers of the soul; far less does it lie in any exercise of these powers. But it is an ingrained quality of the soul itself, lying at the root of these powers in their exercise. And it is evident, that, according to what is the prevailing moral disposition of the soul, accordingly must be the moral actings of the will. According to what sort of a heart a man has, accordingly must be the exercise of his heart and the tenour of his behaviour,—in mat-

ters of moral good and evil. It was to this purpose that our Lord said—'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.' Matt. vii. 16—18."*

VIII. Regeneration is not, then, the *result* of the natural man's choice. His choice of God is the *effect* of the Spirit's regenerating act. "I am found of them that sought me not." Isaiah lxv. 1. Consequently his choice of God is both free and *necessary*. "Simply to will, belongs to man; to will what is evil, to corrupt nature; to will what is good, to grace." Again; this doctrine "offends those, who know not how to distinguish between *necessity* and *compulsion*. . . . .There is such a close connexion between the goodness of God and his divinity, that his deity is not more necessary than his goodness. . . . . .Therefore if a necessity of doing well impairs not the liberty of the divine will in doing well; if the devil, who cannot

* Gib's Contemplations, p. 353.

but do evil, nevertheless sins voluntarily; who then will assert that man sins less voluntarily, because he is under a necessity of sinning? By means of liberty it came to pass that man fell into sin; but now the penal depravity consequent upon sin has also introduced a necessity of sinning in conjunction with this liberty."* So with the regenerate, their new nature imposes upon them a necessity to choose holiness instead of sin, and yet their choice is most free. 1 John iii. 9.

The Arminians constantly maintain, that freedom of will, not only from the coaction of other agents, but also from this necessity of nature, is absolutely requisite to constitute either merit or demerit in human actions. And yet Dr. Whitby, while he strenuously advocates this doctrine, inconsistently enough with himself, admits, "that God is *necessarily* holy, and his will *necessarily* determined to that which is good." But new school theologians have far out-run their Arminian brethren in the downward road of infidelity, and carried out this doctrine of free-will to its legitimate, but

* Calvin's Institutes, B. 2. C. 3. S. 5.

blasphemous results. "Now the reason why God cannot sin, is not because he is naturally unable to sin. . . . . But it is said he cannot sin, because he is voluntarily holy, infinitely disposed not to sin."* That inscrutable Being, the Lord our God; whose name is "holy and reverend;" who is "glorious in holiness," or, whose glory is his holiness; who has declared in reference to his necessary, but ineffable existence, I AM THAT I AM,—and also employed the same language in reference to his holiness,—I AM HOLY,—according to Oberlin Theology, is in his own nature neither sinful nor holy! He has power to sin! His holiness is merely the result of sovereignty! There is no merit in possessing a holy nature! Yea, the possession of a holy nature destroys merit! Verily, these men have become exceedingly bold. "They set their mouth against the heavens," Psalm lxxiii. 9; "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." 1 Tim. i. 7. Not content with the moral desolation that reigns in the track of their erratic course, they have at length blasphemously ascribed to

* Oberlin Evangelist, Sept. 14, 1842.

God, the fancied moral character of their converts. "Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself, and did approve thy sin." Psalm l. 21.

Intelligent Arminians have not proceeded the full length of their principles. Consistency, however, would bring them down to the level of Finneyism. Hence says Edwards,—"It were to be wished, that Doctor Whitby and other divines of the same sort had explained themselves, when they have asserted, that *that* which is necessary, is *not deserving of praise;* at the same time that they have owned God's perfection to be necessary, and so in effect representing God as not deserving praise. Certainly, if their words have any meaning at all, by *praise,* they must mean the exercise or testimony of esteem, respect, or honourable regard. And will they then say, that men are worthy of that esteem, respect, and honour for their virtue, small and imperfect as it is, which yet God is not worthy of, for his infinite righteousness, holiness and goodness? If so, it must be because of some sort of peculiar excellency in the virtuous man, which is his prerogative, wherein he really has

the preference; some dignity, that is entirely distinguished from any excellency or amiableness in God; not in dependence, but in preeminence; which, therefore, he does not receive from God, nor is God the fountain or pattern of it; nor can God, in that respect, stand in competition with him, as the object of honour and regard; but man may claim a peculiar esteem, commendation and glory, to which God can have no pretension."*

IX. Regeneration is not the result of the natural man's improvement of *sufficient grace.* Sufficient grace is regeneration. If sufficient grace, to make a *right* use of the *means* of grace, were given to all men, then all would be saved. For the *abuse* and *right* use of means, is one peculiar mark of difference which distinguishes the regenerate from natural men. It should, however, be observed here, that God manifests many special favours to those who enjoy the means of grace, which elevates their condition above that of the heathen, and increases their responsibility. But such persons, continuing in their natural state, may also enjoy many

* Edwards' Works, Vol. 2. p. 134.

*gifts* of the Spirit, and yet perish. They may be enlightened in the knowledge of the truth, as a science, by the same means that men become enlightened in law, medicine, or the properties of natural things; and this knowledge may be so far operative, as to produce an external reformation. Their gifts, may, like Balaam's, be brilliant; their office, like Ahab's and Judas', high; their profession orthodox; the form of their worship scriptural; and their works, as to the matter of them, good; yet such persons may be, and are lost. If they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them to repentance. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Tit. i. 16. In such persons, mere

*legal* convictions may, and sometimes do, rise higher than in the regenerate. The soul may become frantic under the terrors of the Almighty, and rush, by a suicidal hand, into the full measure of that divine wrath, the mere preludes of which had become intolerable. But the knowledge which the regenerate have of God, differs, not only in degree, but in its own nature, from any thing that can be found in natural men. For, whatever may be the degree of the divine favour, manifested to natural men, in the way of means and common gifts; or, whatever may be the degree of their attainments, none of these things are such preparations for regeneration as necessarily secure the end. Yet they are necessary antecedents, by a divine constitution. A competent knowledge of the scriptures is an indispensable preparation for the exercise of the ministerial office, but not such a preparation as necessarily procures the possession of the office. The law operates upon the natural conscience, before it is purged. Some concern for salvation is produced in the soul, before it is saved; enough, at least, to lead to a diligent attendance upon the means, like the impotent man at the pool of Siloam. For

Lydia *heard*, before the Lord opened her heart, "that she *attended* unto the things spoken by Paul." It is in the sense here explained that sound writers call these things "preparations" for regeneration.

X. Regeneration is not the Spirit's *assistance* of the soul, enabling it to bring *its own* latent principles into activity, which "before lay torpid, like some animals in winter;"* but the renewal or restoration of its faculties to their primitive state. The moral *principles* of the soul in its depraved state, being opposite to the principles of the new birth, the more the faculties are brought into activity about holy things, the more diabolical will be the motives of its conduct. The force of divine truth operating upon a natural conscience, may, and does effect an external reformation, which leads men to do many things good in themselves, and useful to men: may restrain them from many outward transgressions of the divine law, which, if perpetrated, would injure both themselves and others. Thus they secure that "friendship of the world which is enmity with God." James,

* Charnock.

iv. 4. They rise in dignity far above the openly profligate; who fail to secure the poor favour of this world. For "it is not in folly, not to scorn a fool," so egregious as to cheat himself out of both the *present* and future life. But the impelling cause of their activity is directly opposite to that of the regenerate. They seek honour one of another, and not that honour which cometh from God only; therefore it is *impossible* for them to believe in a crucified Redeemer; to deny themselves; and bear the offence of his cross, by means of which the regenerate are crucified to the world and the world to them. However beautiful such persons may *appear* in the estimation of a misjudging world, they have nothing IN THE SOUL, that bears the shadow of resemblance to the inward purity of such as have been born again. Theirs is the religion of nature: their natural principles are invigorated and fortified by a counterfeit holiness; and they live securely in sin: "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them." Luke xi. 44. So, then, *assistance* can only make the lion and the bear more ferocious. It is on this principle

that the gospel becomes emphatically the savour of death to the wicked. Hence, it follows, irresistibly, that the sinner can do nothing efficiently towards the production of this change. The more he struggles to extricate himself the deeper will he plunge himself in the mire of his own filth. "No man *can* come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." The truth of this must be admitted, unless it should be maintained that sin is a suitable preparation for holiness; for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do." John viii. 44. "In opposition to all the modifications of error, upon this subject, we affirm, that conversion is effected by the Almighty grace of God; that man does not concur in it; he is in the first instance passive, and his concurrence is the consequence of supernatural power communicated to him."* How great then is the error of those who exhort poor sinners to engage in some work of their own, preparatory to their coming to Christ! What *can* they do? What are they required to do? Christ came to save lost sinners. They are lost. As lost sinners, then,

* Dick's Theology, vol. 2, p. 150.

they must come to him who is the Saviour of such, simply in the observance of those means which he has appointed, and which he makes *effectual* in the case of all who thus come.

XI. The true doctrine of regeneration neither waives, nor abrogates the divine law; but the doctrines of free will, sufficient grace, and human ability do both: for they suppose that God surrenders his claims of dominion, and gives a legal sanction to transgression. "There are only two ways in which God's moral dominion over rational creatures can be supported, or exist; in their obedience to the precepts of his law, or in their subjection to its penalties. And it is only in this last way, that his moral dominion can be exercised over sinful men as such."* The law always demanded a holy nature; and must for ever continue to make the same requisition. For, "the word of the Lord endureth for ever." 1 Pet. i. 25. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Mark xiii. 31. It is not true, then, that the ability of fallen men is commensurate with the claims of law. It is not true,

* Gib's Contemplations, p. 319.

that "this doctrine has been, and is, the received doctrine of the universal orthodox church." Those who make this assertion are found false witnesses in a matter which concerns the glory of God, and the eternal welfare of our fallen race. They handle the word of God deceitfully. From such presumption, may the Lord in mercy preserve all who profess to be the spiritual guides of men, and deliver his own people from these fearful delusions. "For," says the Saviour, "every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Mat. xv. 13.

XII. Regeneration is not simply giving a *different direction* to the natural man's mental exercises. This doctrine confounds all distinction between the moral character, and conduct of the righteous and the wicked. It does, indeed, admit a change of *acts*, but no change of the principles of acting. It draws the acts of both righteous and wicked from the same source, namely, corrupt nature. In the natural man, it is corrupt nature flowing in its natural channel; in the regenerate, it is the same stream flowing in a *different direction*. According to this theory, a converted man differs nothing in character from

the unconverted. He is still a child of Satan, only acting out of character. It will not do for Pelagians to evade this conclusion, by denying that natural men are the children of Satan. For such a denial contradicts the explicit language of scripture, and does away with the necessity of regeneration. It renders nugatory the words of our Lord: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "The old theology makes regeneration a *radical* change—a change in the disposition and temper of the sinner, as well as in his *acts*. The new regards it as merely giving a different *direction* to our . . . . . [mental exercises;] . . . . . but appears to make little or no difference between the principles of action, in converted and unconverted men."*

XIII. But modern theology does not stop even here. It spreads its poisonous roots through the whole system. It promulgates another gospel, which, indeed, is no gospel. The covenant made with Adam—the imputation of his first sin to his posterity—the covenant of grace made with our Lord Jesus Christ, as the

* Old and New Theology, p. 220.

surety of an elect people—the atonement—the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers —efficacious grace—the nature of justification —of sin—of holiness, have all fallen before its terrific approach. They have left to lost men nothing, on which to build their hopes of heaven. The wildest enthusiasm reigns predominant over a perishing world. They have robbed society of its strong bulwarks. Both civil and religious rights are deprived even of the dry morality of Deism. For it can, and should be, maintained that the present almost universal corruption of morals, is to be traced chiefly to the great prevalence of this new system of theology. For if God may not execute his own law, surely men may not. If it is unjust in God to punish transgression, it is more so in men. Hence, the strong arm of the law falls powerless before the impetuous progress of ignorance, prejudice, malignity, and passion: the riotous mob overawe the ministers of justice: defenceless, but unoffending men are beaten in the streets, till the wronged spirit takes its flight from the mangled body, that it may return to God who gave it: temples consecrated to science, and liberty, and religion, are burnt

to ashes: the father takes the life of the daughter, and the assassin, without provocation, plunges his dagger into the heart of the peaceable unsuspecting citizen. These things are done with impunity, in the face of the sun; while the culprits, though known, escape the indignation of outraged humanity, and the penalty of violated law. The application of law inflicts injury upon the criminal; therefore it is regarded as cruel and unjust to punish the wicked. Thus, the land is polluted with innocent blood. But who does not see, in this state of society, the effect of a system of religious belief, which abolishes the claims of the divine law. If any are so blind, that they cannot see this, all reasoning would be lost upon them. No human being can, indeed, know to what extent efficacious grace may penetrate these labyrinths of error, through the silent operation of the Bible. But this we do know; the public teachers of these errors are putting forth their energies to dishonour the gospel, and deprive the world of its unspeakable blessings, so far as their influence can reach, and be felt. And as we have no power to extricate them from their unhappy delusions, let us daily bear their case on our

spirits, at a throne of grace, and take diligent heed to the unerring word of truth, that we be not drawn into the same snare.

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## CHAPTER III.

### REGENERATION DEFINED.

I. It remains to be proved that regeneration is the infusion of divine light, and spiritual life, into the souls of men. And it is refreshing to turn from the repulsive and destructive doctrines that have been considered, that we may listen to the instructions of God's holy word. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Eph. ii. 10. "Therefore if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. v. 17. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Gal. vi. 15. "Therefore be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create." Isa. lxv. 18.

II. No certain knowledge of this great and

mysterious change can be derived from the term *regeneration.* It is used twice only in the sacred writings. In the first instance, (Mat. xix. 28,) its *application* is not very obvious; at least, commentators have generally satisfied themselves with conjectures; while all admit that it denotes the *restoration* or renewal of something which had been lost. If it be referred in this place, either to our Lord's personal ministry, or the affusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, or the erection of the New Testament church, or the new birth of the disciples, as it undoubtedly must be to some one or all of these things, then it denotes not only a restoration of that which had been lost, but also the restoration of the lost good in a more excellent and glorious manner. In the second instance, (Tit. iii. 5,) it is generally, and, so far as known, universally regarded as expressing the application of redemption in all its parts by the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of REGENERATION and RENEWING of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being

justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

III. If any distinction be made between the import of the terms "regeneration" and "renewing," in the passage, (Tit. iii. 5,) which, in modern language, are synonymous, then the former may refer to the infusion of spiritual life; the latter to the Spirit's work, giving activity to that life; or, the former to the new birth, strictly speaking; the latter to the continued renewal of the decayed exercises of grace. Be this, however, as it may, the whole passage clearly teaches, that it is the office of the Holy Ghost, in the economy of the covenant, to begin and consummate the work of grace upon the souls of such as are saved. Orthodox writers frequently use the term regeneration in this unlimited sense. So, Turretine uses the term conversion as it includes regeneration; which is believed to be its true scriptural meaning: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," Ps. xix. 7. But Witsius, while he uses the term *regeneration* as inclusive of *conversion*, also very clearly distinguishes between them by calling the former the *first* and the latter the *second* regenerating act. "This spi-

ritual life may be considered, either, by way of *faculty*, and in the *first act*, or by way of operation, and in the *second act.*"* In the first act, the soul is passive under Almighty power; in the second act, it becomes active, as instantaneously as mind is capable of acting from conviction produced by some external influence; and thus voluntarily returns to God in the strength of Almighty power working in it, "both to will and to do." "God gives not only the power to walk, but the walk itself."† In modern language, the term regeneration is used to express that which Witsius calls the *first act;* in which sense it is used in the present discussion.

IV. Many definitions have been given of this great spiritual change, more or less true, according to the peculiar views of their authors. But it is extremely difficult, probably impossible, from the nature of the subject, to give such a definition in a single proposition, as to prevent all misapprehension, in the mind even of a candid inquirer after truth. That given by John Marck is here selected: "A benefit of

* Witsius, Vol. 2. p. 53.

† Dr. Anderson's Letters to Bellamy.

the covenant of grace, in which, are given to the elect, on account of the merit of Christ, by the ministry of the word, a new spiritual nature and life, manifesting itself by vital operations, for their salvation, and to the praise of divine grace."* This change is so entirely the effect of Almighty power as to exclude all active co-operation of the soul in its production. The reformed churches have always maintained, in opposition to the advocates of human ability, that regeneration is a supernatural change effected by the *immediate* action of divine power, upon the essential faculties of the soul, infusing divine light, and spiritual life.

V. But whatever may be the degree of excellence, which attaches to the definitions of men, the language of the Spirit is preferable; more true, safe, and conducive to the regeneration, growth and comfort of Christians; for it is the word which is made effectual in the conviction and renewal of natural men, as well as in their progressive sanctification. "Ye have put

* Beneficium fœderis gratiæ, quo electi, ob meritum Christi, per verbi ministerium, nova spirituali natura ac vita, per operationes vitales se manifestante, donantur, ad ipsorum salutem, divinæque gratiæ laudem.—*Caput.* xxviii. § 2.

off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, (or in the righteousness and holiness of the truth, εν δικαιοσυνη και οσιοτητι της αληθειας,) after the image of him that created him."* Here regeneration is called a NEW MAN, whose existence is ascribed to the creating power of God. It is defined to consist in the image of God; which image is farther said to consist in the knowledge, righteousness and holiness of the truth. Taking this portion of God's word for our guide, and drawing additional light from other passages which relate to the subject, in humble reliance on the teaching of its glorious author, it is proposed to make some farther inquiry after this divine, supernatural change, without which none of our lost race shall ever behold the face of God in peace. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be *begotten from above*, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John iii. 3.†

* Compare Eph. iv. 24, with Col. iii. 9, 10.

† *Begotten from above*, is the literal reading of γεννηθη ανωθεν. Our translators have truly rendered γεννηθεις εκ του Θεου "begotten of God," 1 John v. 18. Consequently, the phrase "born of God," should always be understood in the sense of *begotten of God*.

VI. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is analogous to the creation of all things out of nothing, though not in all respects the same. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," Eph. ii. 10. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," 2 Cor. v. 17. "Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature," Gal. vi. 15. It is not the creation of a new being or personality; nor the addition or change of any mental faculty; but the infusion of a new moral nature and capacity into a soul already in possession of all the mental faculties it can ever possess. The history of Adam will illustrate this position, if we suppose, as we have reason to believe, that he was regenerated. The image of God was con-created in his soul, lost by transgression, and restored by regeneration. Yet, through all these changes, Adam never lost either his personal identity, or any of his mental powers. In every state, he continued a rational, accountable moral agent, without any, the least coercion of his freedom of will, and consequently a proper subject of moral government, and of reward and punishment. This distinction be-

tween the mental and moral power of the soul is indispensable. Without it, the doctrine of regeneration, as revealed in the scriptures, cannot be understood. It furnishes a key by which the humble learner may unlock the treasures of hidden wisdom. It lays open to full view and delightful contemplation many of those paradoxical phenomena which meet us at almost every step in the school of divine morals.* Its importance has not escaped the observation of the moral philosopher. "Man is to be contemplated as an intellectual, and as a moral being. By his intellectual powers, he acquires the knowledge of facts, observes their connexions, and traces the conclusions which arise out of them. These mental operations, however, when in a high state of cultivation, may be directed only to truths of an extrinsic kind,—that is, to such as do not exert any influence either on the moral condition of the individual, or on his relations to other sentient beings. . . . . But when we contemplate man as a moral being, new relations open on our view which present considerations of mightier import. We find him occupying a place in a great

* See Erskine's Gospel Sonnets.

system of moral government, in which he has an important station to fill and high duties to perform. We find him placed in certain relations to a great moral Governor, who presides over this system of things, and to a future state of being, for which the present scene is intended to prepare him. . . . . These two parts of his mental constitution we perceive to be remarkably distinct from each other. The former may be in vigorous exercise in him who has little feeling of his moral condition; and the latter may be in a high state of culture in the man who, in point of intellectual acquirement, knows little beyond the truths which it most concerns him to know,—those great but simple principles which guide his conduct as a responsible being."*

VII. There is, also, an adaptation in the mental powers of the soul to be operated upon by the Spirit of God, in the production of this change. This adaptation belongs also to the means employed by the Spirit. For there is certainly a suitableness in the rational nature of man to be operated upon by the force of truth; or no *additional* guilt

* Abercrombie on the Moral Feelings, pp. 15, 16.

could be incurred by a rejection of the gospel. If no such adaptation existed, the gospel might as well be preached to stocks and stones. Its proclamation would not be "the wisdom of God in a mystery;" but the *mere* arbitrary will of God. It would be in its nature the same as though God should command his ministering servants to go daily and water pebbles, expecting them to grow; or sow seed on the naked surface of a rock. Therefore the "simple external demonstration of the divine word ought, indeed, to be fully sufficient for the production of faith, if it were not obstructed by our blindness and perverseness."† "Faith has a perpetual relation to the word, and can no more be separated from it, than the rays from the sun, whence they proceed."‡ Our opponents may here be called upon to inform us how they account for the powerful effects, which it is well known the word frequently produces upon a natural conscience? To what principle or cause do they refer that mighty energy of the word upon a natural man, which almost persuades some to become Christians, causes some to tremble, and drives others to

* Calvin's Inst. B. 3. C. 2. S. 33.

† *Ib.* S. 6.

despair? How do they reach the conscience of the sinner, by the proclamation of the gospel, if there be no adaptation in his intellectual powers to be operated upon by the word of truth? If their view be correct, on what principle will it be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom, Tyre and Sidon, than for Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin? Does not their doctrine represent God as punishing men for their abuse and rejection of means which had no suitableness to their intellectual powers as rational, and therefore accountable agents? But this is not Christianity. It is not the doctrine of the Reformers. It justifiies the Arminian caricature of Calvinism. That moral disease of our nature which is the opposite of regeneration is *depravity;* and under whatever degree of disability natural men may now lie, it is in the first instance the *effect*, not the *cause* of depravity. Hence it is, that a high degree of scriptural knowledge may consist in a natural state equally with ignorance. "Nor do we agree with those, who so inconsiderately assert, that man is no more disposed for regeneration, than a stone or an irrational animal; for there are naturally such faculties in the soul of man as render him a fit subject of re-

generation, which are not to be found in stones and brutes. Thus a man can be regenerated, but a brute or stone cannot."*

VIII. The same truth is also discovered by a comparison of the moral qualities of regenerated persons with those which belong to men in a natural state. The knowledge of the one is saving; John xvii. 3; that of the other is brutish, Jude 10. The one are wise to do evil, Jer. iv. 22; the other are wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 15. The one make choice of the world, Luke xii. 19, the other prefer God, Ps. cxiii. 5. The one choose to obey their own will, Jer. xliv. 17; the other take the will of God for their rule, Acts ix. 6. The one love the world, 1 John iii. 15; the other love God, Ps. xviii. 1. The one desire to be free from the restraint of the divine law, Ps. ii. 3; the other desire to keep the law, Ps. cxix. 5. The one delight in the service of Satan, Eph. ii. 2, 3; the other in the service of God, Ps. xxvii. 4. In all these points of difference between the righteous and the wicked the understanding, will, and affections are the same, the agent is the same, only acting in a different manner, from different principles and motives. This is

* Witsius, Vol. 2. p. 53.

a farther proof of the doctrine laid down in the preceding section. For if there be no adaptation in the soul to be operated upon by the word, in the regenerating act, it is surely necessary, in order to regeneration, that a new soul should be given to men. This point is the more insisted upon, because,—1. It has been denied. 2. If there be no such adaptation, then of course there can be no instrumental suitableness in the word. 3. The objection brought against Calvinists, that they hold the doctrine of a physical change of the mental faculties, would be well founded. It is indeed, true that depravity is an ingrained *quality*, diffusing itself into all the faculties; still it is a *moral quality*, not a *mental faculty*. It neither changes the soul's essence, nor paralyzes the exercise of its faculties. It only pollutes them, and destroys their *right* exercise. To be spiritually dead, is to be *dead in trespasses and sins*, Eph. ii. 1. Consequently, the graces of the Spirit infused in regeneration also become ingrained *qualities* in the soul, restoring the faculties to *right* exercises.

IX. Still the Spirit does not at once wholly eradicate depravity. This is only done at the

believer's death, when the work of sanctification is consummated. From which it appears there is an adaptation in the regenerated soul for the principle both of grace and depravity. The same truth is discovered by a consideration of man in his primitive state. Had there been no adaptation in the soul of Adam for the depravity which ensued upon his transgression, that depravity could not have followed as part of the penalty which was inflicted, without a change of his faculties. Thus man in a state of innocence, and in a state of guilt, would not have been the same individual, but two different species of creatures. So, on the other hand, the regenerated man would not be the same individual after, that he was before regeneration. To such absurdities does the denial of an adaptation in the soul to be operated upon by the word of truth in the hand of the Spirit conduct us. We see then no other conclusion than this:—In the creation, God endowed man with essential faculties suitable to the law which he enstamped in his soul; and that suitableness must continue with him in every change of moral nature, state and relation; for the obvious reason that its loss would

be the loss of his humanity and his transformation into another species of the creatures. Strange indeed, would it be, if that soul, upon which the law was written in its creation, and never totally eradicated, should not only preserve its species, but also its personal identity, and yet lose its suitableness to be operated upon by the same law in conjunction with the gospel! For the gospel which has been added not only harmonizes most perfectly with the law, but increases its adaptation to *sinful* men beyond the power of human computation. If infinite wisdom shines in the work of grace, it is equally apparent in the means.

X. The first creation, then, differs from regeneration in several particulars. That, had no previous existence except in the purpose of God: the principle of this, existed eternally in the being of God, and was con-created in the soul of man. In that, there was nothing on which to act: in this, the essential faculties of the soul are operated upon. In that, there was nothing to oppose: in this, there is not only a moral repugnance to the work, but an active resistance of the will. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," John v. 40.

"Some thought the substance of Adam's soul was corrupted, when he sinned, therefore suppose the substance of his soul to be altered when he is renewed. Sin took not away the essence, but the rectitude; the new creation therefore gives not a new faculty, but a new quality. The cure of the leprosy is not a destroying the fabric of the body, but the disease; yet in regard of the greatness of man's corruption, the soul is so much changed, by these new habits, that it is as it were, a new soul, a new understanding, a new will. . . . . It is a new stringing the instrument to make a new harmony."*

XI. In what sense then, it may be asked, is regeneration called a new creation? It is so called, "in reference to the power exerted in its production:"† in reference to the new moral nature and capacity which is communicated to the soul: in reference to the removal of the total depravity of the soul in its natural state: and in reference to total inability, which had been superinduced by that depravity. So that the soul of the natural man has really no more power to change itself, than it had to create

* Charnock on Regeneration, p. 103. † Witherspoon.

itself at first; or than a dead man has to raise himself to life. But the tree must first be made good, before it can bring forth good fruit: because "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil, only evil, continually." "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord." Jer. ii. 22. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Jer. xiii. 23.

XII. Regeneration is still more analogous to the resurrection from the dead, than to the work of creation, as the resurrection is properly a *re-creation.* "Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." Ezek. xxxvii. 5. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and *now* is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." John v. 25. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. "There is as real a resurrection of the soul, by the trumpet of the gospel, accompanied with the vigorous efficacy of the Holy Ghost, as there shall be of

bodies."* The figure of the resurrection, which is here employed by the Spirit, differs from that of the creation. It carries the mind more directly back to a consideration of the soul in its primitive state; and clearly teaches the doctrine that the image of God which is restored to the soul in regeneration, is essentially the same with that which was con-created in the soul of Adam. "The design and purpose of this change is to repair the loss which man sustained by the fall."† The opinion of Dr. Gill, that the image of God, which is stamped upon the soul in regeneration, is not the image of the first Adam, is to be rejected. He seems to look upon regeneration as the creation of a new being, or at least as the creation of something in man *essentially* different from his nature in a state of innocence. He calls it the image of Christ, in opposition to the image which Adam possessed prior to the fall. Hence, he infers an impropriety, in the use of means by the Spirit, in its production. But the image of the first Adam was in all its moral lineaments the image of Christ. For "God made man in his own image;" and this is the same image

* Charnock, p. 109. † Witherspoon.

which is restored. "After the image of him that created him." "We are changed into the same image." There is a *relative* difference between the image of God upon the soul of Adam, and that which is restored to the regenerate, as well as a difference in their procuring *cause*. But these differences cannot change the essential moral character of either. So the present new life of the redeemed is in respect to its essential moral character, the same that it will be in a future state; yet in a future state, it will differ in degree and extrinsic circumstances beyond the power of human conception. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." 1 Cor. ii. 9. Here, we apprehend, is a greater difference than exists between the image of God upon the souls of the regenerate in this life, and that which Adam possessed in innocence. But it will not be maintained that there is any *radical* difference between the moral character of the Lord's people in the present, and in the future life. These thoughts are important, as they have a direct bearing upon the doctrine advanced in Sections 7, 8, 9.

If Dr. Gill's view be correct, it effectually overthrows the doctrine, that there is an adaptation in the intellectual powers to be operated upon by the word and Spirit of God: for if the image of God, which is impressed upon the soul in regeneration, be essentially different from that which Adam possessed in his primitive state, as the Dr. intimates, (though he has not told us in what that difference consists,) of course there can be no adaptation in the soul to be regenerated; for then regeneration would be the infusion of something which never had any previous existence in the soul: it would in fact be the *addition* of some new thing to its essential faculties.

It is believed this peculiar view of the Dr. lies at the bottom of his doubts respecting the instrumentality of the word in regeneration; and also his denial of that glorious doctrine of the scriptures, that the gospel is addressed indiscriminately to lost sinners of mankind; and is both the call and command of God to all who hear it, requiring faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of their deliverance from sin and wrath. "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." 1 John iii. 23.

XIII. It was intimated in the preceding section that there can be no *radical* difference between the moral character of the image of God upon the souls of the regenerate, and that which was possessed by the first Adam. Nevertheless, the new birth is far more glorious in respect to its *procuring cause* and *relation* to God. That had a respect to God only in his absolute character: this, recognises him in his new covenant character. That was the gift of God's common goodness: this is the gift of God's special mercy, and the purchase of Christ's precious blood. That could be, and was lost: this cannot. That, as to its continuance, was suspended upon the will of man, consequently it was necessarily mutable: this is suspended on the divine will, and therefore immutable. That, had Adam stood, would have rested upon finite merit for its continuance: this, rests upon infinite merit: "Feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood." Acts xx. 28. To both these points of agreement and difference, our Lord evidently alludes in John x. 10: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." In Adam the image of

God was spiritual life. In the regenerate, it is that life, in greater perfection, and more abundance. This view is fully sustained by sound writers on the covenant of works. They tell us the penalty which Adam incurred by transgression consisted in *spiritual*, temporal and eternal death, together with all the evils involved in a punishment so dreadful. The restoration of this spiritual life, by means, and in a manner, that secures it from the possibility of loss, must of necessity be followed with deliverance from all that is evil in the penalty, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of God in a glorified state.

XIV. Regeneration includes the restoration of the intellectual powers to the right *exercise* of their primitive and legitimate functions. Here it may be asked, if there be an adaptation in the intellectual powers to be operated upon by the word and Spirit of God, where is the necessity for the restoration of those powers, and in what does that restoration consist? In reply, let it be observed, that this restoration relates, not to the essential rational nature; but to the moral rational nature, and right *exercise* of the faculties. Simple knowledge may be

conceived, in the abstract, as it is destitute of moral qualities; but not the right knowledge of God. Simple equality of intellectual attainments among men, cannot impart a sufficient knowledge of each other. There must be also a moral affinity. Hence the wicked man can neither understand nor appreciate, either the knowledge, or motives, which influence the conduct, and constitute the moral character of his righteous neighbour. If moral *disparity* deprive beings of equal intellectual power of the ability to know each other; how much more will this disparity deprive a finite mind of ability to comprehend even those things of the infinite mind, which lie within the compass of its mental powers, if the right exercise of those powers were not clogged, yea, paralyzed, by depravity. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" 1 Cor. ii. 11. If then there be any moral quality in the mind of my neighbour, which is not in my own mind, I am wholly unable to comprehend his conduct, so far as it is regulated by that quality. That knowledge of God, then, which is saving, must possess a moral quality corresponding

in kind to the holiness of the divine nature. If it be necessary that we possess a moral spirit resembling that of our neighbour, before we can comprehend him; how much greater must be the necessity, that we should possess a moral spirit resembling the Spirit of God, before we can comprehend the things of the Spirit of God. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit;" externally *in* the word, internally *by* the word, in the souls of the regenerate; "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." 1 Cor. ii. 10. Hence, although man, by the fall, did not absolutely lose all knowledge of God, yet, the knowledge which remained, lost its moral purity; became so entirely vitiated, that any addition to it, without a removal of this depravity, can only lead to an increase of his guilt and misery. For it is only an increase of moral darkness: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?" Matt. vi. 23. It is mere Satanic cunning: "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." Jer. iv. 22. It inclines the will to choose darkness in preference to light: "They did not desire to retain God in their know-

ledge." Rom. i. 28. It renders the soul totally unable even to comprehend the spiritual import of divine truth: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." John i. 5. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14. The consequence of all this is, that the natural man may possess the highest attainable degree of the mere intellectual knowledge of God, and still remain in *total* ignorance of God and divine things. Such a character, fully matured and developed, we have in the devils: "Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble." James ii. 19. The Holy Spirit, then, renews the understanding by a removal of those vicious propensities, by which it was blinded, and by a restoration of the lost image of God. "God can by his commanding power, bring light out of darkness; but it is plainly impossible that darkness should produce light."* "Then opened he their understanding:" "Whose heart the Lord opened;" "The eyes

* Bates, Vol. IV. p. 138.

of your understanding being enlightened:" "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv. 6.

XV. The Spirit, then, in the regenerating act, creates the soul in "the knowledge of the truth." This knowledge consists chiefly in the following things:—1. A discovery of the peculiar glory of God arising from his holy nature, or rather the glory of that nature. 2. The extent and spirituality of the divine law as it is a transcript of Jehovah's holiness. 3. The consequent necessity that the transgressor must suffer the penalty of the law, unless a satisfaction can, in some way, be made. 4. The mercy of God manifested in the gift of his Son to be the sinner's surety, and in that character to make the required satisfaction. 5. A discovery to the soul that a continuance in its natural state, separate from the Lord Jesus Christ, must issue in everlasting death. 6. A discovery to the soul, of the all-sufficiency of Christ to save, together with its warrant to receive him as he is offered to sinners in the

gospel. The infusion of this knowledge in the regenerating act, is the internal means by which the Spirit produces the *principle* or habit of faith in the soul. Hence he is called "the Spirit of faith." 2 Cor. iv. 13.

XVI. Regeneration includes a renewal of the will. In the primitive state of man, with the faculties unclouded by sin, the will would doubtless choose those objects, which the understanding perceived to be the best. But this faculty, like the understanding, having been corrupted by the fall, it is in vain that Arminians, plead the natural operation of the will, as an argument that regeneration is effected merely by such a powerful representation of truth to the mind, that the understanding having perceived it, the will must necessarily chose it; or that it has "an inherent inalienable power" to choose it. Consequently a denial of the doctrine that the will always fully obeys the dictates of the understanding, does not imply that depravity is *limited* to the will. Because in reference to *saving* knowledge the understanding is total darkness even where the external light of the gospel is shining in its meridian splendour. But such are the facul-

ties, such the natural conscience, that the truth may be and is received intellectually by natural men, while the will, under the power of spiritual blindness and depravity, makes active *resistance* to the intellectual light in the soul; and *rejects* even those things which are *intellectually* perceived to be *better*, all things considered, than the things which are chosen. So that natural men have power to reject the gospel wilfully, though they have none to embrace it savingly. "Had I not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." "Ye have both *seen* and *hated* both me and my Father." Herein, then, lies the guilt of men; they violate the dictates of a natural conscience; they reject the only Saviour; they sin wilfully; and their condemnation is just.

XVII. The assertion, "If an object is viewed as good by our understanding, the will chooses it," is not true in any sense, if applied to men in their present imperfect state. If applied to ability of will, in natural men, to choose those objects which the understanding perceives to be good, yea, the greatest good, it imbodies the life and soul of Arminianism. "What we do really believe" says Whitby, "to be our

chief good will be chosen." And that such is the meaning of the writer, by whom it is introduced, is placed beyond controversy, by the connexion in which it stands. Thus, this writer, by *admitting* the accuracy of Whitby's reasoning, is led to maintain that the word cannot operate in regeneration unless "the soul act." That is, he assumes, that the connexion between the acts of the will, and the dictates of the understanding is the same in the natural man, as it was in the primitive state of man; conseqently that the will obeys uniformly and fully the dictates of the understanding. Hence, he concludes that natural men *understand* no more of divine things than the will chooses. This doctrine effectually excludes all *wilful* and presumptuous sins against knowledge: excludes the possibility of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost: and contradicts the explicit testimony of the scriptures. "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." John v. 40. "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen, and hated both me and my Father." John xv. 24. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the hea-

venly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," &c. Heb. vi. 4—6 "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James iv. 17. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and, the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. From this false premise that the will is fully as the understanding, he comes to a conclusion, if not identical with that of Dr. Whitby, still it is the result of the same mode of reasoning, and equally fallacious. He infers from it, that if the word be the instrument of regeneration, the soul must act; that it is *unphilosophical* to suppose otherwise; that it implies the doctrine, that regeneration is effected by a mere illumination of the understanding and consequent choice of the will. He will insist,

that there is no alternative, no middle ground, between Arminianism on the one hand, and the denial of instrumentality on the other. If this view of the will be not the doctrine of Arminians and Pelagians, what is? They tell us the command to obey supposes *ability*. This writer tells us, that if the Spirit employ means, the soul must have *ability* to use means; for it "must act." Edwards on the Will is introduced to support this view. But this is the very use Pelagians have made of that masterly production; namely, a perversion of its true import, to the maintenance of an error which Edwards abhorred. This can be easily demonstrated.

XVIII. Let us then examine Edward's views of the will. It will convince the candid that the principles of that great man have been perverted to an unworthy purpose. When speaking of the connexion of the acts of the will with the dictates of the understanding, he uses the following language: "Every act of the will is SOME WAY connected with the understanding, and is, as the greatest apparent good is, in the manner which has already been explained; namely, that the soul always wills, or

chooses that which in the present view of the mind, considered in the whole of that view, and all that belongs to it, appears MOST AGREEABLE."* Here it is worthy of observation, that Edwards does not say, that the will chooses that which the understanding perceives to "be good," or "the greatest good;" but that which "appears MOST AGREEABLE." "It must be observed in what sense I use the term good;" namely, as of the same import with AGREEABLE."† Some little difference surely between "the greatest good," and things "most agreeable," in the estimation of depraved men. Edward's remarks apply to the natural unobstructed operation of the will. Those who pervert the sense, by overlooking the connexion and explanations of that guarded writer, and by the substitution of one little monosyllable in the place of his own language, have made his unparalleled work on the will the basis of monstrous errors. Nor is this all: the view which the writer in question has given of Edwards on the will, would make that writer self-contradictory. For, while he maintains

* Edwards on the Will, Part 2, Sec. 9.

† Ib. Part 1. Sec. 2.

an inseparable connexion, in "some way," between the dictates of the understanding and the acts of the will: he also declares, "It is that MOTIVE, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will."* The *moral state* of the mind, then, may be such as to present a stronger motive for action, to the will, than the most unequivocal conviction of the understanding. Hence Edwards speaks of *subjective* motives, such as are in the mind. He supposes that the moral state may be such as to counteract the natural operation of the laws of mind; which is always the case when the *corrupt bias* of the affections preponderates over the *convictions* of the understanding, and becomes the governing cause of the will's choice. It is therefore an undeniable truth,—a truth also clearly taught by Edwards, that the *moral feelings* operate conjointly with the convictions of the understanding in supplying the will with its governing motives of choice; and that in the natural man, and sometimes in the regenerate, through remaining depravity, the former may prepon-

* Part 1. Sec. 2.

derate over the latter. In this case, the depravity of the will is demonstrated, and the necessity for its renewal is clearly seen. Were not the will depraved, it would never choose the promptings of corrupt nature against the convictions of greater good. That such is the doctrine of the Bible has been proved in the preceding sections. And if the reader have any doubt respecting the views of Edwards, he is requested to consider attentively the following words: "I might farther observe, that the *state of mind* which views a proposed object of choice, is another thing that contributes to the agreeableness or disagreeableness of that object; the particular temper which the mind has by nature, or that has been introduced and established by education, example, custom, or some other means; or the frame or state that the mind is in on a particular occasion. That object which appears agreeable to one, does not so to another. And the same object does not always appear alike agreeable to the same person, at different times. It is most agreeable to some men to follow their reason; and, to others, to follow their appetites: to some men, it is more agreeable to deny a vi-

cious inclination, than to gratify it: others it suits best to gratify the vilest appetites."*

"In many even of our *voluntary* actions, we may act from the impulse of appetite, affection, or passion. . . . . It is evident, that mankind, in all ages, have conceived two parts in the human constitution that may have influence upon our *voluntary* actions. These we call by the general names of *passion* and *reason;* and we shall find in all languages names that are equivalent. . . . . To act against what one judges to be for his real good upon the whole, is folly. To act against what he judges to be his duty, is immorality. It cannot be denied, that there are too many instances of both in human life. Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor, is neither an impossible, nor an unfrequent case."†

XIX. "I shall not attempt to picture to you the wretchedness of a world, in which such feelings, [feelings of moral approbation, or disapprobation, which arise on the contemplation of certain actions,] were not a part of

* Part 1. Sec. 2.

† *Reid, On the Influence of Motives upon the Will, &c. pp.* 473, 474, 480.

the mental constitution—a world without virtue—without love of man or love of God—in which wherever a human being met a human being, he met him as a robber, or a murderer, living only to fear, and to destroy, and dying, to leave on earth a carcass still less loathsome in all its loathsomeness, than the living form which had been animated but with guilt. Our only comfort in considering such a dreadful state of society, is, that it could not long subsist, and that the earth must soon have been freed from the misery which disgraced it. . . . . God, the author of all our enjoyments, has willed us to be moral beings, for he could not will us to be happy, in the noblest sense of that term, without rendering us capable of practising and admiring virtue. . . . . When some country is found, in which the intentional producer of pure unmixed misery is preferred, on that very account, to the intentional producer of as much good as an individual is capable of producing,—some country, in which it is reckoned more meritorious to hate than to love a benefactor, merely for being a benefactor, and to love rather than to hate the betrayer of his friend, merely for being the betrayer of his

friend,—then may the distinctions of morality be said to be as mutable, perhaps, as any other of the caprices of the most capricious fancy. But the denier of moral distinctions knows well, that it is impossible for him to prove the original indifference of actions in this way. He knows the intentional producer of evil, as *pure evil*, is always hated; the intentional producer of good, as *pure good*, always loved."* But for what reason is the intentional producer of evil always hated, &c.? Because the moral sense, which we call conscience, is an original, inherent, indestructible faculty of the human soul, which uniformly attaches a moral quality to actions other than those which are purely natural. However depressed under a sense of guilt, or overwhelmed with the pollution of sin, or blinded by passion it may be, still it exists; still its functions are exercised in every sane mind. And hence we discover the *errors* of men in those wrong decisions of conscience which proceed from some false standard of judgment; and the *depravity* of men in the choice of those things which conscience con-

* Brown's Philosophy, Vol. II. pp. 233, 248.

demns. "Hence," says Mr. Reid, "to act against what one judges to be his real good, upon the whole, is folly. To act against what he judges to be his duty, is immorality." So then this folly and immorality are native fruits of *depravity*, and evidences of human guilt. But the reader may be ready to inquire what has all this to do with regeneration? It is apprehended it has a direct bearing upon the doctrine advanced in the present work, that there is an adaptation in the essential faculties of the soul to be operated upon by the word and Spirit of God in the regenerating act. Is there no adaptation in the divine light which shines in the word to illuminate the understanding, by means of which conscience is furnished with a correct standard of judgment? Is there no adaptation in the purity of the word to excite a healthy exercise of conscience? No *adaptation* in the conscience to be thus operated upon? If these questions be answered in the negative, we know not where to look for any basis in the human soul on which God founds the claims of his law. Hence it is concluded with confidence that a denial of the adaptation of the soul to be regenerated by the

word of truth, amounts to a denial of moral agency. It reduces man, if not to a level with a brute or a stone, at least to a mere machine, in no way responsible for any vile use to which it may be applied.

XX. If the views presented in the preceding sections be correct, it will follow that the will must be renewed in regeneration, and restored to the right exercise of its legitimate functions. If, in natural men, it chooses the dictates of the understanding, by its own inherent inalienable power, then its renewal cannot be necessary; it is already right. But our Lord predicates of the will, both depravity and impotency. "Ye *will not* come to me, that ye might have life." "No man *can* come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." Accordingly, we find the renewal of the will asserted in the scriptures: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," Ps. cx. 3. Nor is this all; the continued exercise of the renewed will is ascribed to the same Almighty power by which it was at first regenerated. "For it is God that worketh in you both to *will* and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. ii. 13. "If a good man, who knows

much of his duty, who has been long accustomed to the discharge of it, and often tasted the sweets of communion with God, whilst engaged in his service; if in the midst of all his advantages, experience, and hope, he cannot of himself will or perform any thing that is spiritually good; much less the sinner, whose heart is carnal, who is a slave to his lusts, and the tyranny of the god of this world.* "So then" regeneration "is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Rom. ix. 16.

Hence it is with unfeigned regret, we observe the equivocal manner in which Dr. Dick has expressed himself on a point of such vitality. He does indeed assert that a renewal of the will is necessary; but immediately adds: "The renovation of the will may be considered as the natural consequence of the illumination of the understanding. . . . . The different faculties are only different modes in which the soul exerts itself. . . . . Nothing more seems to be necessary than that the object should be presented in such a light as to obtain the deli-

* Lime Street Lecture, p. 297.

berate and final decision of the understanding in its favour. . . . . Although the heart may and often does oppose, slight and transient convictions of truth and duty, it does not follow that it will act the same part, when the evidence is full and irresistible, or when the word comes 'in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power.' . . . . It is more modest to avoid determining whether his (the Spirit's) agency upon the will is *mediate* or *immediate*.''* On this passage it is proper to observe, 1. It is of no consequence to the argument whether the understanding and will be distinct faculties, or only different modes in which the soul exerts itself: we know that the soul has power both to *understand* and to *will*, and that God doth not renew the one faculty without the other. Hence, if we cannot determine whether his agency in the case of the will be *mediate* or *immediate*, neither can we determine this in the case of the understanding. It is certain that it is the whole soul that is renewed by one instantaneous act of Almighty power; and if, as the Dr. alleges, there is strictly speak-

* Dick's Theology, Vol. 2. pp. 160, 161.

ing no such thing as different faculties, how can the action of the Spirit of God be *immediate* upon the understanding and only *mediate* upon the will? 2. Hence any doubt respecting the *immediate* action of the Spirit of God upon the will must involve us at once in equal doubt respecting his *immediate* action upon the understanding. 3. It is evident, however, that the soul both understands and wills; and that its acts, though always connected "in some way" with the understanding, are nevertheless not only clearly distinct acts, but *depravity* also frequently makes them contradictory. The poor drunkard will weep over his misery, and betake himself again to his cups; and he that knows the good will pursue the evil. Before it can be proved that the will is not renewed by an immediate action of divine power, one of two things must first be established: that there is no such thing in the world as sin against knowledge, or that man is a machine, and freedom of volition a fiction. It is indeed true, that the new-born soul, *so far as its spiritual life is operative,* cannot deliberately choose sin. But it still does this when not

restrained by its new nature. 4. The argument of the Dr. that "although the heart does oppose slight and transient convictions, it does not follow that it will act the same part when the evidence is full and irresistible, or when the word comes in demonstration of the Spirit and with power," is (1.) Inconclusive, for, if the will resists even "slight and transient convictions," its depravity is fully established. (2.) It is not to the purpose; for when the evidence is irresistible, and the word comes in demonstration of the Spirit and with power, that is regeneration, and consequently the renewal of the will. 5. To question the immediate action of divine power in the renewal of the will is to question the explicit testimony of the scriptures: for "it is God who works in *believers* both to *will* and to do; and much more is it necessary he should work in the whole soul in the regenerating act.

XXI. Regeneration includes the righteousness of the truth. This righteousness is so nearly allied to holiness, and so inseparable from it, that it is difficult to distinguish the one from the other. But it is evident, that

a proper distinction exists; for the Spirit of God uses no words without meaning. It appears the term righteous, when applied to God, denotes the essential rectitude of his nature; but when applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, in his mediatorial character, it expresses his *conformity to law in all respects*, as our surety. This righteousness being imputed is not created in the soul in the regenerating act, but a rectitude of soul is infused, corresponding in nature, though not in degree, to the essential rectitude of the divine nature, so far as such rectitude can be possessed by a creature in an imperfect state. It is that *principle* in the soul which leads to the exercise of justice towards God and men. It must not, therefore, be confounded with the righteousness of Christ, which is its meritorious cause. The imputed righteousness of Christ is "the righteousness of persons, of believers, as in Christ: it is the Saviour's holiness in human nature; his obedient life, and satisfactory sufferings, imputed to them; of this they glory and boast: Is. xiv. 24, 'In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.'" But the righteousness which is infused in regeneration is

"the righteousness of their nature and life, as renewed, assisted, and directed by the Spirit of God: this they disclaim in the case of justification."*

XXII. The righteousness then which is infused in regeneration consists in a renewal of the conscience, or *moral sense.* If the moral sense operate in a right manner, and by a right standard, it must necessarily make a man righteous. "Having our hearts purged from an evil conscience," Heb. x. 22. This moral sense is an essential faculty of the soul. There was in a state of innocence an exact conformity between the moral sense and the law which was con-created or written upon the soul in its creation. The latter was the rule of operation to the former. Consequently, the soul of man in his primitive state was in the possession both of an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong, and of an infallible standard of moral deportment. Both these advantages are still imperfectly possessed by all men, though rendered nugatory, as respects saving operations of mind, through depravity. This doctrine

* Brown of Haddington.

the apostle proves by citing the example of the Heathen, "which show the WORK of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness," &c. Rom. ii. 15. That is, there is among the Heathen a universal intuitive judgment of right and wrong, rising above the laws and customs of men, which demonstrates the existence of conscience, and also shows the law of God enstamped upon the soul of man in his creation. The existence of this moral sense will not be denied.* False systems of religion, no less than the true, prove its existence. It is *this*, which constitutes man a religious being, whether born in a Pagan, Mohammedan, or Christian land. It is *this*, which constitutes him a proper subject of moral obligation. It is the indestructible basis in the soul, upon which God founds the claims of his law upon the human race; which causes the possession of the external means of grace to be a blessing or a curse of infinite magnitude; which, in short, constitutes the *adaptation* of the soul to be regenerated by means of the word

* Consult Wayland's Elements of Moral Science. Chap. II.

of truth in the hand of the Spirit. Man is *conscious* that he possesses a moral character, and that all his thoughts and actions must be either morally good, or morally bad, except such as are in their own nature purely natural, nor is it in his power wholly to divest himself for any considerable length of time of this consciousness. Neither that blindness of mind which leads men to adopt an *external* and false standard by which conscience is regulated, and which is the origin of all the idolatry and superstition in the world; nor that depravity which impels them to violate its dictates, can either obliterate it from the soul, or destroy its binding obligation, or excuse their guilt.

XXIII. Conscience, then, should not be *confounded with* the inherent sense of the being of God.* The latter is the effect of the law

* An attempt was made in Germany several years ago, to prove that no inherent sense of God exists in the mind. We refer to the history of Caspar Hauser, of whom it is reported, that he was kept in solitary confinement, from his birth, till he arrived at the age of manhood; was never permitted to see the light of heaven, or a human shape; nor to hear the sound of the human voice; and that, when released, and instructed, he declared he had not the least

written upon the heart, which law is the rule of conscience. Both are so vitiated by depravity that they are insufficient to bring back the soul to God. Hence the necessity both of divine revelation, and regeneration. For the impression which the mind receives of the being and character of God, whether true or false, or by whatever means it is made, is always the standard of rule by which conscience is regulated. The manifestation of the being of God, in the works of creation and providence, is this rule to the Heathen; and the violation of the dictates of conscience operating by this rule, constitutes their actual transgression. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest to them; . . . . . so that they are without excuse," Rom. i. 19, 20. So that in every instance of error and immorality, in Pagan lands, there is to a certain extent a *wilful* violation both of law and the dictates of conscience." "They did not *like* to acknowledge God," Rom. i. 28. How much more

sense of God till it was taught him. This story, however, if true, proves nothing farther than that means and opportunity are necessary for the *exercise* of the soul's faculties.

strikingly is this truth seen in those who live under the dispensation of the gospel, and yet believe not. They violate conscience enlightened by the written word, and despise the very word by which it has been enlightened. Hence the powerful effect of the word upon the natural conscience; by means of which sinners are made a terror to themselves, Jer. xx. 4; nay, they are consumed with terrors, Ps. lxxxiii. 19. "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish," Acts xiii. 41. Two things, then, are necessary to constitute a natural man righteous: 1. A removal of the depravity of the conscience and its restoration to a right and faithful exercise. "The conscience is purged," Heb. ix. 14. 2. A standard by which it operates, which is the word of God; a true knowledge of which is communicated to the soul in the regenerating act. "I will write my law in their hearts," Jer. xxxi. 33. Thus the soul is made righteous, judges righteous judgment, and performs righteous works.

XXIV. Regeneration includes the holiness of the truth. This holiness is a moral character the opposite of sin, which is the foundation of a holy life. And although imperfect

in degree, it is nevertheless the impress of Jehovah's own likeness upon the soul. Hence the regenerate are said to be "partakers of the divine nature." 2 Pet. i. 4. As God is glorious in holiness, so this holiness is the glory of the new-born soul. It adds a brilliant lustre to the gifts and graces of the Spirit, and becomes henceforth, to the new man, the object of supreme desire, and ardent pursuit; because, as it increases in degree, by the right and diligent use of divinely appointed means; so, in this manner, it gradually arrives to a full, *active* conformity to the image of God. Thus its capacity for the enjoyment of God is enlarged, till it "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. iv. 13.

XXV. Regeneration includes saving faith, as to its *principle* in the soul: its *exercise,* being the instantaneous effect of its implantation, in the regenerating act. This is evident from several scriptures: but let one passage answer the present purpose: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his

name: who *were born* not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 12, 13.

XXVI. It also includes all the saving graces of the Holy Spirit, as to their being in the soul. A perfect new creature has been produced, which, in the use of suitable means, will go on to perfection, till it enter the mansions of the blessed, and appear in the presence of God, in a glorified state. "Generation gives the whole shape of the child, unless it be monstrous. God doth not produce monsters in grace."*

XXVII. Finally, the *mystical* union between Christ and believers is effected by, and included in the regenerating act. For although the *legal* union between Christ and his people is eternal, still they are born "children of wrath even as others," Eph. ii. 3: "Having no hope, and without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12, till regenerated in their effectual calling. This is the day of their espousal to Christ; the beginning of a new and holy life; the dawn of heavenly glory upon the soul. Of this mys-

* Charnock.

tical union, the scriptures speak explicitly in numerous places. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Eph. v. 30. "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church," v. 32. "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." John xvii. 22, 23. In regeneration this union is formed: Christ unites himself to the soul by his life-giving Spirit in the regenerating act, and the soul unites itself to Christ by faith. Thus the union is *reciprocal,* because the parties concerned are mutually united; *spiritual,* in its own nature, because it is effected by the Holy Ghost; and *mystical,* because it cannot be comprehended by us. We know it is revealed; we feel its effects. But who shall declare this secret work of God upon the souls of the redeemed? If his works of providence are a profound mystery; (Ps. lxxvii. 19,) much more his works of grace.

XXVIII. "Here, as much as any where, we have great cause to acknowledge with the apostle, that "without controversy, great is the

mystery of godliness," even so great, that it could not have entered into "the heart of man to conceive of it," if God had not made it known, in the gospel, by supernatural revelation.

"One great mystery is, that the holy frame and disposition whereby our souls are furnished and enabled for immediate practice of the law, must be obtained by receiving it out of Christ's fulness, as a thing already prepared and brought to an existence for us in Christ, and treasured up in him; and that as we are justified by a righteousness wrought out in Christ, and imputed to us; so we are sanctified by such a holy frame and qualifications as are first wrought out and completed in Christ for us, and then wrought in us. And as our natural corruption was produced originally in the first Adam, and propagated from him to us; so, our new nature and holiness is first produced in Christ, and derived from him to us, or as it were propagated. So that we are not all to work together with Christ, in making or producing that holy frame in us, but only to take it to ourselves, and use it in our holy practice, as made ready to our hands. Thus we have fellowship

with Christ, in receiving that holy frame of spirit that was originally in him: for fellowship is, when several persons have the same thing in common, 1 John i. 1, 2, 3. This mystery is so great, that notwithstanding all the light of the gospel, we commonly think that we must get a holy frame by producing it anew in ourselves, and by forming and working it out of our own hearts. Therefore many that are seriously devout, take a great deal of pains to mortify their corrupt nature, and beget a holy frame of heart in themselves, by striving earnestly to master their sinful lusts, and by pressing vehemently upon their hearts, many motives to godliness, labouring importunately to squeeze good qualifications out of them, as oil out of a flint. They account, that though they be justified by a righteousness wrought out by Christ, yet they must be sanctified by a holiness wrought out by themselves. And though out of humility, they are willing to call it infused grace, yet they think they must get the infusion of it by the same manner of working, as if it were wholly acquired by their own endeavours. . . . . It is by our being in Christ, and having Christ him-

self in us; and that not merely by his universal presence as he is God, but by such a close union, as that we are one spirit and one flesh with him; which is a privilege peculiar to those that are truly sanctified. I may well call this a *mystical union*, because the apostle calleth it a *great mystery*, in an epistle full of mysteries, Eph. v. 22; intimating, that it is eminently great above many other mysteries. . . . . We receive from Christ a new holy frame and nature, whereby we are enabled for a holy practice, by union and fellowship with him, in like manner. 1. As Christ lived in our nature by the Father, John vi. 57. 2. As we receive original sin and death propagated to us from the first Adam, Rom. v. 12, 14, 16, 17. 3. As the natural body receiveth sense, motion and nourishment, from the head, Col. ii. 16. 4. As the branch receiveth its sap, juice and fructifying virtue from the vine, John xv. 4, 5. 5. As the wife bringeth forth fruit by virtue of her conjugal union with her husband, Rom. vii. 4. 6. As stones become a holy temple, by being built upon the foundation, and joined with the chief corner-stone,

1 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6. 7. As we receive the nourishing virtue of bread by eating it, and of wine, by drinking it, John vi. 51, 55, 57; which last resemblance is used to seal to us our communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper. Here are seven resemblances instanced, whereof some do illustrate the mystery spoken of more fully than others: all of them do some way intimate, that our new life and holy nature are first in Christ, and then in us, by a true proper union and fellowship with him. If any should urge, that the similitude of Adam and his seed, and of married couples, do make rather for a relative than a real union betwixt Christ and us: let them consider that all nations are really made of one blood, which was first in Adam, Acts xvii. 26; and that the first woman was made out of the body of Adam, and was really bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. And by this first married couple, the mystical union of Christ and his church, is eminently resembled, Gen. ii. 20, 23, 24. Eph. v. 30, 31, 32. And yet it supposeth both these resemblances in the nearness and fulness of them; because those that are joined to the

Lord, are not only *one flesh*, but *one spirit* with him."*

XXIX. "The *mystery* of a doctrine does not hinder it from being true. It is no objection against Christianity that there are things in it beyond the grasp of reason. "We see through a glass darkly." This does not make it a heap of enthusiasm, a piece of priestcraft in those that deliver it, or a blind implicit faith in them that receive it, as will be seen by the following particulars: 1. The difficulty or easiness of a doctrine, does not make it the matter of our faith, but we go entirely upon the sufficiency of the evidence. 2. This obtains in every part of life, and it is strange we should exclude it from religion. 3. It is no way unaccountable that the nature and the designs of God should be incomprehensible to us. 4. It is necessary that our understanding should honour the revelation of God by a subjection, as well as our wills by a compliance. 5. These are not mysteries of man's forging, but we have them in the book of God. 6. They are not concealed by any party or tribe among

* Marshall on Sanctification, pp. 52, 53, 54, 60, 61.

us, but lie open to be seen and read of all men. Therefore, 7. The design of preaching them, is not to set up the tyranny of priests, but to lead people to a veneration for their God, a dependence upon him, and an application to him.

"It is no argument against Christianity that it is a mystery; because our believing of any thing is not at all concerned in the difficulty or easiness of a proposition, but in the sufficiency of the evidence upon which it comes. Timothy was to continue in the things he had learned and been assured of, knowing of whom he had learned them. 2 Tim. iii. 14."*

* Bradbury's Mystery of Godliness, pp. 49, 50.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MANNER OF REGENERATION.

I. The *manner*, then, by which the Spirit works in the application of redemption is inexplicable: above, though not contrary to our reason. The trinity and unity of three persons in the Godhead—the two distinct natures and one person of Christ—and the mystical union between Christ and believers, are three mysterious facts revealed in the sacred writings. These are corner stones on which the whole system of Christian doctrines are based; but against which all error is more or less directly aimed. "Deism, polytheism, and atheism, are directly opposed to the first, and consequently to the other two. Judaism, Arianism, Sabellianism, and Socinianism, are directly opposed to the second, and consequently to the first and third. All the errors and confusion of doctrines which prevail among *Christians*, excepting on the questions which relate to the external order of the Church, militate

against the third; and if carried out consistently, to their full length, would also indirectly oppose the two first mysteries."* If the view of this writer be correct, then, on the one hand, an accurate knowledge of the nature of regeneration is no less essential to the well being of the Christian church, than the knowledge of God; for it is itself the saving knowledge of God. So, on the other hand, all attempts to explain the *manner* by which the Spirit employs the instrumentality of the word, in effecting this change, manifests the highest degree of presumption. Consequently, all experience has demonstrated the hazardous enterprise of those who have engaged in such attempts. The delusions into which the undertaking has plunged them, are standing monuments of their folly, which serve as beacons of warning to *others* not to dash against the rock upon which *they* made shipwreck of faith.

II. Although the *manner* of the Spirit's operation in regeneration is a profound mystery to us, being the "wisdom of God in a myste-

* Ely's Contrast, pp. 138, 139.

ry;" still there are some things connected with it, which may be understood, and should be attentively considered. We know it is such, that the soul is wholly *passive* under the regenerating act of the Spirit: that is, the soul has no active agency in its production. "All that is meant by the soul being passive, is, that it is not the agent of the change in question. Its immediate and delightful turning unto God is its own act; the state of mind which leads to this act is produced directly by the Spirit of God. Sure it is, that this change is in scripture always referred to the Holy Spirit. It is the soul that believes, repents, hopes, and fears; but it is the Holy Spirit that regenerates. He is the author of our faith and repentance by [enabling and] inducing us to act, but no man regenerates himself. The soul, although essentially active, is still capable* of being acted upon. It receives impressions from sensible

* It is believed, nothing more is intended, by the word "capable," than passive power, or simple adaptation; as it is frequently used in this sense; but the reader will perceive, by a reference to Chap. II. Sect. V., that we have adopted the words "adaptation" and "suitableness," believing them less liable to misapprehension.

objects, from other spirits, and from the Holy Ghost. In every sensation there is an impression made by some external object, and the immediate knowledge which the mind takes of the impression. As to the first point, it is passive, or the subject; as to the second, it is active, or the agent. These two are indeed inseparably connected, and so are regeneration and conversion."* The Spirit's work, then, in the production of this change, according to this writer, and in this he is undoubtedly correct, is so entirely sovereign and omnipotent in its first act, as to exclude the active co-operation of the soul. This, however, does not exclude, but supposes the adaptation of its faculties to be thus acted upon. This adaptation could not be lost by the fall without a change of the soul's substance. It is similar to the capacity of Adam's body to receive in a passive way the soul which was breathed into it by the Almighty.

III. The remark in the above quotation, that the soul "receives impressions from sensible objects, from other spirits, and from the Holy Ghost," is true; but it conveys no addi-

* Biblical Repertory.

tional light to the mind respecting the *manner* of the Spirit's work; and without explanation is liable to serious misapprehension. We can understand the manner by which the soul receives impressions from sensible objects and from other spirits; but not the manner by which it is impressed by the Holy Spirit. Sensible objects are merely the *occasion*, but in no proper sense the *cause* of impressions upon the soul. They cannot be said to *act* upon the soul in any manner. Other spirits impress the soul merely by the power of suasion; and while they are, in this sense, the cause of the impression, they can exert no manner of influence upon the soul beyond or above that suasion. But the Holy Spirit operates upon the soul, in the regenerating act, by the divine omnipotent suasion of his own word, in a manner no less incomprehensible than glorious, infusing not only divine light, but spiritual life. For such is the depravity of the soul, that it is not only unable to receive this impression of the Spirit, even in a passive way; but is also necessarily inclined, by the reigning power of that depravity, to make active *resistance*, till the depravity be removed, by the Spirit's in-

fusion of the opposite principle of holiness. When this is done, the soul becomes active; it co-operates with the word; *in* which the Spirit came into the soul; by which he effected the change; and which he still employs in turning the soul actively to himself; while the soul voluntarily returns to God, being powerfully, ineffably and sweetly drawn, without the least coercion, by the continued working of the indwelling Spirit. Is there any impression upon the soul, any agency, like this, in nature? Where is the mind of sufficient daring to venture an intrusion into this divine mystery? or the pen sufficiently bold to undertake its solution? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John iii. 8.

IV. Regeneration is an instantaneous act. The soul is either dead or alive; has either the spirit of the flesh and the world, or the Spirit of God; "is either in the state of grace or the state of malediction; is either the child of God or of the devil."* "Our souls are necessarily either in one state, or its opposite; and our

* Witsius.

transition, therefore, from one to the other, must be instantaneous; as when God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'"* It is evident, then, there can be no intervening state between that of life and death. "It may, perhaps, be thought by some, that the difference between instantaneous and gradual regeneration is not important."† But its importance will be seen, on the one hand, in the argument against those who deny the instrumentality of the word, and against the Pelagians on the other. For if it be instantaneous, the soul cannot be active by *assistance;* and if it include the *grace* of faith, as we have seen it does, then the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word is established. This will be farther seen by a perusal of Part II. It is certain the Pelagian doctrine of regeneration, necessarily implies that it is gradual. That doctrine represents it as consisting in *acts* produced by the presentation of motives; which presuppose reasoning, comparison of objects, conviction and choice; that it is brought about by the ordinary operation of truth upon the mind, and of the mind again upon the truth. Their rege-

* Old and New Theology, p. 197. † Ibid.

neration is nothing more than conversion, or the *second* act. They seem not to have the least conception of the holy *nature*, which is communicated in regeneration, and which is the source of those *acts* that they suppose to be regeneration; but which are, indeed, its effects; and flow from it, even as a sweet fountain is the source of streams like itself. "Of course, gradual regeneration involves a denial of total depravity, and the necessity of an entire radical change of character. It fosters pride and self-righteousness, and produces hostility to those doctrines of grace, which distinguish the gospel from the religion of nature. It is, in short, taking a step towards infidelity."* "Thou blind Pharisee! cleanse *first* that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also." Matt. xxiii. 26.

V. It has been said, that the manner in which "the word operates as an instrument in this work, is a subject, which from its very nature, can, and therefore should be understood by us." This is one of those radical errors, from which proceed many pestilent delusions that have almost banished true religion from a

* Old and New Theology, p. 197.

large portion of the visible church. It is the origin of innumerable metaphysical speculations that have not only darkened counsel by words without knowledge; but also perplexed and involved the minds of men in inextricable labyrinths. These speculations have resulted in the general prevalence of infidelity and immorality. Nor do the advocates of a philosophic and liberal religion appear to be at all disheartened by their numerous defeats, or by the mischievous fruits of their labours. They must *understand* every thing, or they will believe *nothing;* as if they really suppose nothing can exist beyond the compass of their intellectual powers. The confidence and vanity of the human mind is an incurable disease, which pervades the whole soul, and which nothing except regenerating grace can eradicate. "As thou knowest not what is the *way of the Spirit,* nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou *knowest not the works of God,* who maketh all," Eccl. xi. 5. "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and *wonderfully* made," Ps. cxxxix. 14. "But if those things which regard the origin of our body, and the beginning of this animal life, are

involved in such darkness as to frustrate the inquiries of the most sagacious, how much more involved, are the things that constitute our spiritual regeneration, which none can doubt to be mystery all over."*

VI. The principle of life is too abstract to be grasped by the human intellect. We only know that God is its author; that it exists, because we see and feel its effects, and that it is produced by means, or the employment of secondary and instrumental causes. But of the *manner* of its production, we know nothing. Is it then unphilosophical to maintain, on the authority of the word of God, that means are employed, but that we cannot understand the manner of the operation of these means, in the production of a *principle*, the nature of which is incomprehensible? And yet the *existence* of this principle can no more be doubted than our own existence, because it rests on the same evidence,—namely, our consciousness. Is it not rather unphilosophical to deny the existence of a revealed fact, which can neither be proved nor disproved by human testimony, or human reasoning? We know that God quick-

* Witsius.

ens the fœtus in the womb of animals, by an *immediate*, though ineffable exercise of Almighty power, and that he doth not do this without the use of means. We learn the same truth in the vegetation of plants: the soil must be prepared, the seed sown: and although there is a *natural tendency* in the earth to vivify the seed, which is not in the soul of the natural man to become active by the word, yet it is God that communicates the living *principle*, by the additional means of light and heat and moisture, in a manner inscrutable to us. In the scriptures of truth we also learn that the Spirit of God communicates the principle of spiritual life to the souls of men formerly dead in sin, by means of the word. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which *effectually worketh* also in you that believe," 1 Thess. ii. 13. That is, they received it not only as it is the word of God in opposition to the doctrines of men, but also as operating upon them in a *manner* differing essentially from that by which the persuasion of one hu-

man mind acts upon another. It *worked effectually* in them that believed. It was received by divine power, and it continued to work by divine power.

VII. The Spirit acts in sovereignty. He is sovereign "over the word which works; over the soul wrought upon; over the time and season of working;"* and, it may be added, over the instrument which conveys the word; and over the particular portion of the word employed. "If the Spirit of God preach that one or any such word to the soul, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' John iii. 16, it will be cast down with the fear of perishing, and drawn out of itself by that, and raised up and drawn to Jesus Christ, by the hope of everlasting life; it will believe on him that it may have life, and be influenced with the love of God, and give itself to him, who so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son to purchase for us that everlasting life. Thus may that word prove this immortal seed,

* Flavel, Vol. 2, p. 299.

which though very often read and heard before, was but a dead letter."* "The secret counsel of the most High, though we must adore with reverence, it is impossible for us to comprehend. What influence this has upon the final state of particular persons, no man in the present life is, and probably no created being shall ever be, able fully to explain. This only we know, that, although its execution is infallibly certain, yet it is not such as to take away the guilt of sin, or DESTROY THE EFFICACY OF MEANS."†

VIII. Hence it ought not to be asserted, that the *manner* in which "the word operates as an instrument in this work, is a subject, which from its very nature, can, and therefore should be understood by us." It is believed the more intelligent and sober-minded people of God, will unite in the condemnation of such a sentiment. Its origin may be readily traced to the presumptuous self-will of man, "Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." Col. i. 18. Although *apparently* opposite, still

* Leighton on 2 Pet. i. 23. † Witherspoon.

it belongs to that school of *philosophical* divinity which asserts the independency of the creature, maintains that the greatest good of the creature is the supreme end of all the works of God: that in this the holiness of God consists: and that it would be sin in God to make his own glory the end of his works. This is going one step beyond the old Tempter. He only asserted that God ought to have made the greatest good of the creature the end of his works, not that he had done so. "Why hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?—For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Gen. iii. 1, 5. But whatever may be the speculations of men, let humble Christians rejoice that they have an infallible guide,—the Spirit of God, speaking in the scriptures, and operating in their hearts. *They* know that regeneration is one of the "deep things of God," into which holy angels desire to look. 1 Pet. i. 12. They have learned more modesty in speaking of heavenly mysteries, which involve the glory of God and their own salvation. They will not thus rashly venture

within the "bounds" which God has placed around his throne. They *know* that a subject, in the contemplation of which angels learn "the manifold wisdom of God," (Eph. iii. 10,) neither *can* nor *should* be understood by us. They deplore that presumption of fallen men, which attempts to reach the bounds, and fathom the depths, and scan the heights of "the unsearchable riches of Christ," Eph. iii. 8. "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom. xi. 33.

# PART II.

## THE WORD THE INSTRUMENT OF REGENERATION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STATE OF THE QUESTION.

God works by external means in the application of redemption. For although he "is free to work without, above, and contrary to them at pleasure," still, "it *pleased* God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," 1 Cor. i. 21: and thus to make the gospel "the POWER of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Rom. i. 16.

I. The gospel, taken in its broadest signification, is the external means of regeneration. Strictly speaking, the gospel being a proclamation of the good tidings of a free pardon to the guilty, is the reverse of the law. But in

preaching the gospel the law must be proclaimed in conjunction with it, for various reasons: 1. As it is the rule of perfect and perpetual obedience: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Luke x. 27. 2. As it is an exhibition of the initial holiness communicated in the regenerating act, and without which no man shall see the Lord. 3. As it exacts its full penalty upon transgressors: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezek. xviii. 4. "For the wages of sin is death." Rom. vi. 23. 4. As it rewards the righteous: "He shall reward every man according to his works." Matt. xvi. 27. 5. As it commands faith in Christ: "This is his commandment, that we should believe on his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John iii. 23. 6. As it is a rule of life to believers: "Being not without law to God, but under law to Christ." 1 Cor. ix. 21. 7. As it is the *measure* of sanctification: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Ps. cxix. 1. 8. As it is in conjunction with the gospel, the means of sanctification: "Sanctify them through

thy truth; thy word is truth." John xvii. 17. 9. As obedience to the law is the evidence of regeneration: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." 1 John iii. 9. It is in this sense the terms "gospel," and "word," are used indiscriminately in the present discussion. The *word*, then, as it includes all that portion of revealed truth which is *moral* in its own nature, in opposition to positive institutions, is the *instrument* of regeneration.

II. The word, however, is not a natural instrument, which operates necessarily as the sun gives light; nor is it like a sharp knife which necessarily cuts if applied to a suitable material with sufficient power; but it is a moral instrument in the hand of the Spirit, made efficacious by Almighty power, in a manner unknown to us. Consequently it is called the instrument of regeneration, as it is the *external* means employed by the Spirit in the proposition of spiritual life, to the intellectual powers; and doctrinally the *internal* means of the conveyance of that life into the soul, in the regenerating act; for it is in this act the doctrine of the word is indelibly imprinted upon the soul, and the new creature brought into being. It is not

supposed that the word, considered simply in the letter of it as clothed in words, or as it conveys ideas to the intellectual faculty, is the instrument of regeneration. But it is so, as the words are the words of the Holy Ghost, and as the ideas are the WILL of God. These ideas are presented to the minds of all men, who live under a gospel dispensation, by reading and hearing the word. But they are presented to the mind by the same outward and ordinary means as is any other subject of human knowledge, and operate much in the same way. Hence, though the word is God's, yet in this case, it is not God who speaks it directly to men. But in the regenerating act, God himself presents these ideas to the mind, that are a declaration of his *will,* which is made efficient by omnipotent power. In the preaching of the gospel, we have a *general* declaration of his will in the word, made *indefinitely* to all who hear it; in the regenerating act, we have a *special* declaration of his will made to the soul in *particular,* through the word, the doctrine of which is his *will.* Thus, his will is made known to the soul through the word; is efficacious through the word; and the new creature which was not, now IS. "Be-

cause the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are; That no flesh should glory in his presence." 1 Cor. i. 25—29.

III. It is vain then for men to speculate about the mode in which divine creating power operates, either in nature or grace. He has told us his word is the declaration of his will, by which he applies the blessings of redemption to his people; that in the regenerate it is his *will exercised.* How childish and futile, then, are the cavils and objections of men against the divine mysteries, revealed in the word! "The omnipotence of God, it must be allowed, bears to every created power the same relation of awful superiority, which his

infinite wisdom and goodness bear to the humble knowledge and virtue of his creatures. . . . In contemplating it, we consider only his *will*, as the direct *antecedent* of those glorious effects which the universe displays. . . . . We conceive only the *divine will itself*, as if made visible to our imagination, and all nature at the very moment rising round. . . . . Such is the great charm of the celebrated passage of Genesis, descriptive of the creation of light. It is from stating nothing more than the antecedent and consequent, that the majestic simplicity of the description is derived. God *speaks*, and *it is done*. We imagine nothing intermediate. In our highest contemplation of his power, we believe only, that, when he willed creation, a world arose; and that in all future time, his will to create cannot exist, without being followed by the instant rise into being of whatever he may have willed; that his will to destroy any thing, will be, in like manner, followed by its non-existence; and his will to vary the course of things by miraculous appearances."*

* Brown's Philosophy, Vol. I. pp. 74, 75.

IV. It forms no part of the present design to speak of the meritorious, or procuring cause of regeneration, which is the righteousness of Christ.

V. It forms no part of the present design to speak of the efficient cause of regeneration; that subject having been discussed in the first part of the work.

VI. It is then to the *external means* employed by the Holy Ghost in the application of salvation to his people that the present inquiry is directed. These means are two-fold, *direct* or principal, and *indirect*, or subordinate. These terms are selected for the want of better. By *direct* means is intended the word as just explained. By *indirect* means are intended all the positive institutions of scripture now in force. Under the Old Testament economy of the covenant, these were the Levitical ritual, prophecy, occasional commands, like that given to Moses in the wilderness to erect the brazen serpent, and to the Syrian to wash in Jordan. These positive institutions, though given in part for the removal of temporal calamities, were, nevertheless, typical of the positive institutions under the New Testament, which

are the ministry of the word, sacraments, and the external order of the church. These indirect means are as variously employed as the various dispensations of divine providence towards nations, churches, families, and individuals. If it should be thought, the dispensations of divine providence ought to be ranked with *indirect* means of grace, the author cannot object. But he prefers to regard the providence of God as it furnishes instruments, occasions, and opportunities for the employment of means; because through all the revolutions brought about in his mysterious providence, since the canon of revelation was closed, *positive* institutions have been invariably the *indirect*, and the word the *direct* means of regeneration.

VII. This distinction between direct and indirect means is clearly marked in the scriptures. "For," says Paul, "I have begotten you through the gospel." 1 Cor. iv. 15. Paul was the medium through whom the word was conveyed to the Corinthians: and thus he was the instrument in the providence of God, of constituting them into their church state, and bringing them externally into a covenant rela-

tion with God, by means of the gospel which he had preached to them. But this was not all. Some at least among the Corinthians had been regenerated: "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Here, again, Paul's agency must be limited to the ministry of the word; yet both the begetting to a church state, and to a new life, were effected "through the gospel." So then, while Paul was the medium through which the Holy Ghost conveyed the word to the Corinthians, the word was the medium through which he conveyed himself into their hearts, in the regenerating act.

VIII. The positive institutions of the New Testament, then, are either the medium of conveyance or *helps* to the word. The sacraments are a symbolical representation to the senses of the spiritual things revealed in the word; consequently, they are helps to it, as they produce in the minds of believers more lively and permanent impressions of divine things. They are also dependent upon the instrumentality of the word for any efficacy which may attend their administration. In the case of adults, faith in Christ, as he is revealed in the word, is a necessary prerequisite to a right reception of baptism; and, in like manner, self-examination

by the word, is a necessary prerequisite to a worthy participation in the Lord's supper: and these preparations can *only* be made by means of the word.

IX. Some of the occasional commands under the Jewish dispensation, as also under the personal ministry of our Lord, had in themselves neither any adaptation or tendency to produce the result which was effected by them; such as the command to the Syrian, and putting clay upon the eyes of the blind man. No such commands have place under the gospel dispensation. Consequently, no argument can be legitimately drawn from them against the suitableness and tendency of the word to regenerate; especially if it be kept in view that the word is moral in its own nature, in opposition to all positive institutions. These occasional commands do, indeed, illustrate the *inefficacy* of means when unattended by divine power. Yet there is a tendency in the word to regenerate, and, also a tendency in *positive* institutions to help the word, or rather to help our apprehension of the word.

X. The word, then, is essentially different from all positive institutions. *They* are founded merely in the will of God: but *that* also in the

nature of God. God is free to act, "without, above, or contrary" to means. But not *contrary* to those means which are moral in their own nature. God cannot lie, cannot deny himself. He cannot command the creature to have any other God before him. Having decreed in sovereignty to reveal himself to men, that revelation could not be, as to the moral substance of it, otherwise than it is. Having decreed to give man a law defining and regulating his duty to his Maker, that law, so far as it is moral, could not be otherwise than it is. It is founded in the nature of God, and adapted to the nature of man. "The law of the Lord is perfect." Having decreed to save sinners, through the satisfaction of a surety, that surety and satisfaction could not be different from what they are. Having decreed to save men by the preaching of the gospel, that gospel could not be essentially different from what it is. Therefore, although the authority of God, speaking in the word, is the formal reason of man's obedience, and sufficient to silence every objection, still the word was given in infinite wisdom, and possesses a perfect adaptation to regenerate the souls of men. "For as the rain

cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Is. lv. 10, 11. "Hence it is evident that the gospel, considered simply as a moral means, and *independently* of the divine constitution, which has connected the influences of the Spirit with the preaching of it, possesses a fitness, an adaptation to the end proposed, which is not to be found in any other part of the word."*

XI. The doctrine of the instrumentality of the word *limits* neither the power nor the sovereignty of God. "But they plead, that it is unworthy of the Spirit of God, to whom all things ought to be subject, to be made subject to the scripture. As though it were ignominious to the Holy Spirit to be every where equal and uniform, in all things invariably consistent with himself. If he were to be conformed to the rules of men, or of angels, or of

* Dick's Theology, vol. 2, p. 351.

any other beings, I grant he might then be considered as degraded, or even reduced to a state of servitude; but while he is compared with himself, and considered in himself, who will assert that he is thereby injured? This is bringing him to the test of examination. I confess it is. But it is the way which he has chosen for the confirmation of his majesty among us. We ought to be satisfied, as soon as he communicates himself to us. But, lest the spirit of Satan should insinuate himself under his name, HE CHOOSES TO BE RECOGNISED BY US FROM HIS IMAGE, WHICH HE HATH IMPRESSED IN THE SCRIPTURES."* Hence, although God is free to act without means, yet in the application of redemption he has been pleased to bind himself and us to the use of his word. "The Spirit acts not without the word."†

XII. This doctrine must not be extended to other dispensations of divine Providence, which are the execution of God's secret decrees. As the decrees of God are *never* a rule of duty to

* Calvin's Institutes, B. I., Chap. 9, Sec. 2.

† Turretine.

us, so God has revealed nothing respecting the means which he will use to bring about his purposes, except incidental hints concerning certain events contained in the prophetical portions of the word; which, however, are not a rule of duty. So far is the secret providence of God from being a rule of duty to us, that God has prohibited us from regarding it in this light. "He that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap . . . . . In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Eccl. xi. 4, 6. So the sincerity and vigour of Abraham's faith was demonstrated by unshaken reliance on the promise of God at a time when his providence *appeared* to be such as to render the accomplishment of the promise impossible. "He staggered not at the promise, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."

XIII. God is free to act without, above, and contrary to means and natural laws, in the execution of his purposes, and in the fulfilment of his promises to protect, preserve, and save his

people from natural evil, and to punish their enemies. Thus Moses was sustained forty days upon mount Horeb without the ordinary use of food. Ex. xxxiv. 28. The human nature of our Lord was also sustained in like manner through the same period of time. Mat. iv. 2. He arrested the natural course of the planets; (Joshua x. 12;) and the stars fought against Sisera, (Judges v. 20;) the shadow of the sun upon the dial returned ten degrees backward; (Is. xxxviii. 8;) lions were deprived of their natural ferocity; (Dan. vi. 22;) and fire lost its power to burn. In allusion to such deliverances, God declares by the prophet, "I will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." Hosea i. 7.

XIV. God is free to work in the regenerating act without *positive* institutions, and also *above*, though neither without, nor *contrary* to the word. Considering the word in its true character, as a moral institution, it would imply a contradiction, to suppose there can be any divine saving operations in any way that would militate against its appointment by God as the means of regeneration. Even infants, although

regenerated without any *external* employment of the word, in which respect only they differ from adults, still we have reason to believe that the doctrine of the word is written upon their hearts, in the regenerating act, even as it is upon the hearts of adults. The word being, as we shall see in the next chapter, doctrinally, the seminal principle of regeneration. Thus, in the case of the thief upon the cross, positive institutions were necessarily dispensed with, on account of insurmountable obstacles in the existing circumstances; yet the word was employed. So in the case of infants and persons deprived of the exercise of their faculties. God works *above* the *external* employment of the word, on account of the present incapacity of the subjects upon which he operates, but not without nor contrary to it; for he employs it *internally*, imprinting its doctrine upon the soul, which will manifest itself by the soul's employment of the word, as soon as the opportunity is afforded, and the faculties are brought into intelligent exercise, either by their natural growth, or by the translation of the soul to heaven. "Before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee." Jer. i. 5. "When Elizabeth

heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb." Luke i. 41. It would do violence to these passages to *restrict* them wholly to a sanctification or setting apart to office: for it became manifest by the subsequent history, both of Jeremiah and John the Baptist, that regenerating grace was included in this sanctification. In regenerating infants, then, the Holy Ghost, without any *external* proposition of the word, of which they are incapable, imprints internally its doctrine upon the soul, which "they will come to the actual knowledge of, by reading and hearing the word preached," 'when they grow up."*

XV. The exceptions to the use of means, found in the scriptures, are such as establish rather than weaken the doctrine of instrumentality. These exceptions may be reduced to several general heads: 1. God acts *above*, but not without, nor contrary to the word in the case of infants and persons deprived of the exercise of their faculties. 2. God acts *without* positive institutions: (1.) In the absence of a suitable opportunity, as in the case of the thief upon the cross: (2.) In the absence of persons

* Witsius, vol. 2, p. 70.

authorized to observe them in a lawful manner. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." 1 Sam. xv. 22. 3. God acts *without, above,* and *contrary* to the natural operation of cause and effect, in such instances as the following: (1.) In the execution of his secret will in certain cases. (2.) In the deliverance of his people out of difficulties from which they could not be delivered if left under the natural operation of cause and effect. (3.) In the "signs" and "wonders" done for the revelation and confirmation of the scriptures. 4. God inspired men in some cases, to reveal his will by an *immediate* action upon the soul, without the employment of means. This kind of immediate action, so far as known to us, is limited entirely to inspiration and other gifts connected with it. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal.

i. 11, 12. In such cases, men were instruments in the hand of God, not under the operation of the ordinary laws of free-will, moral agency, and accountability. Consequently this gift of inspiration produced no effect upon the moral character. Hence, "the Spirit of God came upon" Balaam; (Num. xxiv. 2,) yet he remained under the dominion of his covetousness. Jude 11. In regeneration God works by means according to our rational nature as accountable creatures: in inspiration he used men as instruments in his hand, for the accomplishment of his purposes. The gift of inspiration was also accompanied with other extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, for the confirmation of the truths revealed; such as "the word of wisdom,"—"the word of knowledge,"—faith, and the power of working miracles. These gifts were all communicated by the *inward working* of the Spirit. 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.*

XVI. To deny then the instrumentality of the word in the regenerating act is to confound that act with inspiration, which Turretine de-

* For a lucid exposition of this passage, consult Macknight.

nominates an "enthusiastic regeneration."* Nor is this all; it overlooks the wonderful works of God, which were performed through many ages of the world, for the revelation and establishment of his word, that the church might be "perfect" as to means, "thoroughly furnished for every good work;" it disregards the uniform tenor of divine providence, sending the word as the means by which the church has been established in every part of the world, where it has existed; it leaves out of view the total cessation of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit as soon as the canon of revelation had been completed and sealed up, and forgets the standing command to try the spirits, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, 1 John iv. 1. In short, it opens the door to every species of the wildest enthusiasm and disorder,—it inculcates that fanatical regeneration, under whose shadowing wings Quakerism, Mormonism, and every other similar delusion may find a secure asylum in the church of God,—it is that imaginary regeneration without a heart and life conformed to the whole revealed will of God, which has in every age slain its thousands, and in our day its

* De Vocatione et Fide, Quest. 4, Sec. 17.

tens of thousands. "Regeneration is no delusive, oraculous voice, sounding into the natural ear, giving an imaginary idea and representation of Christ, as a man, so and so glorious and comely: no, no: may God deliver his people from such satanical delusions, too much supported by some in our day. But here there is no sound of human voices, no sight of human shapes, but a spiritual view of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, as he is the wisdom of God and the power of God; and a spiritual hearing of his quickening word of grace in the gospel, coming 'not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,' 1 Thess. i. 5. Others hear the sound of words and syllables as well as they, but they do not hear the voice of the Son of God, touching, and reaching, catching, quickening and captivating their whole soul."*

XVII. The *immediate* operation of divine power through the instrumentality of the word, in the regenerating act, is a supernatural work, and therefore incomprehensible. But not more so than the production of animal and vegetable life. For, although the latter may be denominated a natural work in distinction

* Sermon by Ralph Erskine, on John v. 25.

from regeneration, still the *manner* is equally incomprehensible. This, indeed, is true of all the works of God, which are effected through the operation of second causes. Could the doctrine of immediate action without instrumentality in regeneration be established, it would effectually exclude all means from the government of God, and destroy all responsibility of the creature. Consequently, every argument which has been or can be adduced against the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, will apply with equal force against its instrumentality in the work of sanctification. But the Lord sanctifies his people through the truth, John xvii. 17. Still it is the Spirit who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, (Phil. ii. 13,) by an *immediate* exercise of the same divine power that he put forth in the regenerating act. It is believed that few will deny this doctrine; but, that you may believe it, listen attentively to God's unerring testimony in the scriptures: "Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power," Col. i. 11. "Wherefore, also, we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and THE WORK OF

FAITH WITH POWER; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Thess. i. 11, 12. "That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead," &c. Eph. i. 18—20. "Who are kept by THE POWER OF GOD, through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. i. 5.

XVIII. The point at present in controversy then is not,—1. *How the Spirit* works in the regenerating act, his action being supernatural and mysterious. 2. Nor *how the soul* operates by the word in this act, for it is effected antecedently, "at least in the order of nature to any act of grace put forth by us." 3. Nor *how the word* operates, for it does not operate effectually by itself; it is not active, considered as separate from the Spirit. But the Spirit employs it, and gives it efficacy in the regenerating act, which being a supernatural work, the *manner* of the word's operation in the hand of the Spirit, must also necessarily lie beyond the sphere of human observation. But

the question is,—DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT ALWAYS EMPLOY EXTERNALLY "THE WORD OF TRUTH," IN THE VERY ACT OF REGENERATING ADULTS, WHO ARE IN THE EXERCISE OF THEIR FACULTIES? This question, the reader will find answered in the affirmative in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE WORD PROVED TO BE THE INSTRUMENT OF REGENERATION.

Having divested the question of extraneous matters, the reader will be able to weigh the direct and positive testimony of the scriptures, without any unnecessary incumbrance.

I. It may tend to the removal of prejudices to call attention by way of introduction to the divine procedure in the natural world. This is so clearly marked by the use of means, that, reasoning from analogy, we might readily conclude, that the employment of means is a universal principle in the moral government of God. His word was employed in the creation of all things out of nothing: "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." Gen. i. 3. "Let his

angels, all his hosts, sun, moon, stars, heaven of heavens, and the waters above the heavens, praise the name of the Lord; for he *commanded*, and they were created." Ps. cxlviii. 2—5. The word was employed in the creation of Adam and Eve; and although it is in God we "live and move and have our being," still our life is sustained by the constant use of many means, the removal of which would be speedily followed with death. Therefore, "through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed *by the word of God.*" Heb. xi. 3. It is worthy of observation, that the apostle adopts the same phraseology in describing the application of redemption: "God, who *commanded* the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv. 6. An attempt is made to neutralize the force of these testimonies by the suggestion that the words were not actually spoken; or if spoken, they were nothing more than the expression of divine power. But this is a violation of a long established rule of criticism, which prohibits the conversion of simple narrative into metaphor. It gives too much countenance to that class of mystical

critics who have converted the whole history of Moses into an allegory.

II. The word is, doctrinally, the *seminal* principle, or *internal* means of regeneration. It exhibits to the intellectual faculty the image of the things imprinted on the soul in the regenerating act. So that the indelible impression upon the soul, or the infusion into it of the doctrinal principles of the word, is the internal means of regeneration. This writing the law upon the heart, this restoring the lost image of God, this putting into the soul the word as the foundation of faith, must necessarily be followed with activity. And whether there be a *conjoint* operation of divine power, both by the word, and also immediately and *distinctly* from the word, cannot be known by us. That there is an immediate action *by* and *with* the word is certain. But that there is an immediate action *distinct* from the word, cannot be *positively* proved; and should not be asserted; for it is a thing too high for us. But the language of scripture, while it warns us not to intrude into this mystery, clearly teaches us that there is no regenerating work of the Spirit, except *through* the word in *some way* written in the soul. It is stoutly argued, that

Turretine teaches the doctrine of an *immediate* action upon the soul, without or *independent* of this operation by the word, fitting the faculties for an active reception of the word. His words, literally translated, are as follow:— "Acting in the word morally by the revelation and persuasion of the object, (the word;) operating in the heart efficaciously and hyperphysically, by the infusion of good habits, the creation of a new heart, and the powerful impression of the object proposed." Again: "So the Spirit indeed is correctly said not to operate without the word, but not by the word only, but also immediately and *distinctly* from the word."* From these extracts, it will be seen that Turretine has been misapprehended. For he asserts again and again the doctrine, that "the Spirit acts not without the word," consequently not independent of the operation by the word. When he says the Spirit "acts immediately and *distinctly* from the word," he evidently intends nothing more than that the word is always inefficacious without the action of the Spirit. Any other construction would make Turretine contradict himself. But if

* De Vocatione et Fide, Quest. 4. Sec. 17, 23.

his language does really teach the sentiment that is ascribed to it, then it is clearly unscriptural. It is an attempt to explain that which is supernatural, and which God has declared to be incomprehensible to us. For the scriptures not only declare the *manner* of the Spirit's work, but also the *manner* of the operation of the word, to be alike mysterious. These are the deep things of God. "The kingdom of heaven is as if a man should cast seed into the ground, . . . . and the seed should spring and grow up, HE KNOWETH NOT HOW." Mark iv. 26, 27.

III. If the fore-cited text be duly considered, it will be seen, that Turretine, though a bulwark of orthodoxy, has either been misapprehended, or he has in this instance given us the result of his own reasoning powers, instead of the Spirit's testimony. But taking his words in the greatest latitude, they do not amount to a denial of the instrumentality of the word in the regenerating act. However, the language of the venerable Westminster Assembly is far preferable, as it is clearly scriptural: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an EFFECTUAL MEANS of enlightening, convincing and

converting sinners."* So far as human authority may be allowed to influence the mind, the authority of the Assembly should certainly be held paramount to that of any individual, however eminent he may be. The Spirit of God is in the word, and the word is from the Spirit, in the regenerating act. The word comes not in word only, but in power, and IN the Holy Ghost." 1 Thess. i. 5. "This only would I learn of you: received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or BY THE HEARING OF FAITH?" Gal. iii. 2. The language of Turretine, in the sense ascribed to it, is to be rejected; because, if true, it cannot be proved true; because it is an attempt to explain that which God has taught us cannot be explained; and because it gives too much countenance to that "enthusiastic regeneration," which he so justly condemns. For the gospel "is the POWER of God unto salvation." Rom. i. 16. And the apostle tells the Corinthians his solicitude was so great, that their faith should stand in the POWER of God, that he declared the things of the gospel only in the words which the Holy

* Compare Question 155 of the Larger Catechism with Question 89 of the Shorter.

Ghost taught him. 1 Cor. ii. Compare verses 5th and 13th. If then the words of scripture are the POWER OF GOD, when communicated internally and doctrinally to the souls of men by the Holy Spirit, who can prove that the Spirit "operates distinctly from the word?" Surely none. Much less can it be proved that the Spirit operates *without* the word. Hence, "though men may be able to withstand the influence of the word, when spoken by men, they cannot withstand it, when savingly applied by the Holy Ghost.* The word, then, when applied to the soul by Almighty power, is made active, communicates new life, in the regenerating act, and "grows up" in sanctification, in a manner we KNOW NOT HOW! Great is the mystery of godliness! and Christ "believed on in the world," is not the least part of this mystery.

IV. But although Turretine's language, quoted in the preceding section, may be liable to misapprehension, still it is evident from the connexion and uniform tendency of his doctrine, that he gives no countenance to an en-

* Brown's Body of Divinity, p. 354.

thusiastic regeneration, nor to any gracious work of the Spirit *distinct* from the word. For in the same section, which contains the objectionable words, he throws in the following caution:—"Let no man invent to himself an enthusiastic regeneration, because the Spirit acts not without the word, at least in the usual and common method of acting, which he employs towards adults. But that he is able to operate extraordinarily without the word, by secret motions and internal inspirations, as was frequently done towards inspired men, θεοπνευστος, no one, I suppose, will doubt or deny. Nevertheless, the reason and causality of each is not the same."* Again: "God wills to act here [in regeneration] in a manner suitable to our rational nature, and according to the apostle. Rom. x. 17. It is certain the word must necessarily concur with the Spirit, in order to our conversion, according to the order of God and the constitution of the covenant of grace, Is. lix. 21; and that without the word the Spirit does not work conversion in

* See Part II., chap. I., Sec. xv. of this work, where the difference here hinted at by Turretine, is pointed out.

adults.* If such a man as Turretine failed in the attempt to describe the *manner* in which the word operates in regeneration, it should teach *us* more modesty; especially, if in addition to this, it be remembered that every similar attempt has proved abortive; and, in many instances, this temerity has been punished with fatal delusions.

V. The word is frequently called *seed.* In the passage already quoted, (Mark iv. 26, 27,) it is said to "spring and grow up." An attempt, however, is made to evade the force of this testimony, by referring the term seed to the principle of regeneration. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." 1 John iii. 9. It is true, the word seed is used figuratively to express its product. In a natural sense the Jews are the seed of Abraham; which seed our Lord

* Deus agere hic velit modo naturæ rationali convenienti, et juxta Apostolum. Rom. x. 17. Certum est verbum necessario concurrere debere cum Spiritu ad nostri conversionem ex ordine Dei, et fœderis gratiæ constitutione. Is. lix. 21, et sine eo Spiritum in adultis illam non operari.—*Tom.* 2, p. 573.

took upon himself. In a pactional sense, believers are called the seed of Abraham, as they are interested in the covenant which was made with him. In a more proper sense, believers are the spiritual seed of Christ. But in 1 John iii. 9, it may be observed, there appears to be a distinction between the seed and the regenerating principle. 1. He *doth* not sin, because his seed remaineth in him. 2. He *cannot* sin, because he is begotten of God. Here the *principle* of regeneration appears to be the reason why he cannot sin; and the *seed* the reason why he doth not will to sin, or the means by which he is preserved from sin. This is entirely scriptural. "By the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." Ps. xvii. 4. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not offend against thee." Ps. cxix. 11. Macknight thus paraphrases the passage:—"Whosoever hath been begotten of God, being renewed in his nature, doth not commit sin habitually; because God's seed of the word abideth in him: and he cannot sin habitually; because he hath been begotten of God, and possesseth the moral qualities of his Father." But there need be no contention here, for

should the sense given to the passage by our opponents be admitted, it cannot help their cause, the word being in Mark iv. 26, 27, and elsewhere, unequivocally called the seed of regeneration.

VI. It is also contended that the phrase, "incorruptible seed," 1 Pet. i. 23, in like manner, denotes the *principle* of regeneration. Should this be admitted against the uniform current of testimony, still it is by the word that the principle is produced. The passage may be, and has been thus translated: "Having been regenerated, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *through the word of the living God.*" It is admitted the last clause may with equal propriety be read, "through the word of God who liveth," &c. But this does not affect the doctrine of the passage. For the apostle adds, in the 25th verse,—"This is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you." The apostle evidently draws a comparison between the seed by which the human body is produced, and the word as it is the means of regeneration. That is from man, who being corrupt flesh, is as grass: This is from God, who is incorruptible and eternal. That pro-

duces an offspring corrupt and perishing like itself: This produces an offspring incorruptible and immortal like itself. But, that the word is intended in Mark iv. 26, 27, is placed beyond all controversy by a reference to the parallel passage in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. There, it is seed which "fell by the way-side,"—"upon stony places,"—"among thorns,"—and "into good ground." It is not supposed that any will contend that the seed here is the principle of regeneration. See also, Luke viii. 11: "The seed is the word of God." And that which fell upon "good ground" represents persons already regenerated, who, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it and "bring forth fruit with patience." v. 15.

VII. But James i. 18, effectually settles this controversy: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." The Greek word απεκυησεν, here translated begat, denotes impregnation. The passage may be thus read: "Of his own will he hath *impregnated* us with the word of truth." It is surely the seed that impregnates, which is here called "the word of truth." And that the "word" is to be understood as

explained above, in the first chapter of this part of the work, is evident from the following verses, where it is the word which Christians must be swift to hear and ready to obey. "Let every man be swift to hear," ver. 19: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only," ver. 22. This exposition of the passage is so uniformly sustained by the concurrent testimony of orthodox writers, that the citation of particular names is altogether unnecessary.

VIII. James i. 21, is also equally conclusive: "Receive with meekness the engrafted [or implanted εμφυτον,] word, which is able to save your souls." This passage is an exhortation to Christians to make a right improvement of the word, which had been engrafted into their souls in the regenerating act spoken of in the 18th verse. Whether εμφυτον be translated engrafted or implanted, the doctrine is the same: If the former, then it is an allusion to a well known fact in grafting trees that the engrafted scion changes the nature of the parent stock, causing it to produce fruit of the nature of the scion. Not only a proof that the doctrine of the word is engrafted into the soul in the regenerating act; but also a beautiful illustration of

the power of the word in carrying on the work of sanctification till the soul is fully conformed to it. If the term *implanted* should be preferred, then it is a continuation of the metaphor of seed, to which reference had been made in the 18th verse.

IX. Romans vi. 17, is equally conclusive: "Ye have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered unto you." Or, "Ye have obeyed from the heart the mould of doctrine into which ye had been cast," or delivered: *υπηκουσατε εκ καρδιας εις ον παρεδοθητε τυπον διδαχης.* This language represents the soul as receiving a new nature by receiving the impress of the word, and having its moral lineaments fashioned into the doctrine of the word, even as metal receives the form of the mould into which it is cast. The heart being thus changed, by the Spirit through the instrumentality of the word, the whole soul, as a necessary consequence, obeyed the word from the heart; that is, truly and sincerely. Therefore, the regenerate are said to be created in the knowledge, righteousness and holiness of THE TRUTH."

X. Romans vii. 9, teaches the same doctrine: "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The apostle certainly speaks of the change which passed upon him in the regenerating act. When he "heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and knew that that voice was the voice of Jesus, *he was born again.* A saving conviction of sin flashed into his mind with the celerity of lightning; for by those words of Jesus, the doctrine of the law, of which he before had an intellectual knowledge, was written upon his soul. Paul is a new creature, and as instantaneously as it is possible for mind to act from conviction, "trembling and astonished," he cries out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Nor did the extraordinary circumstances attending this effectual call of the apostle affect, in any way, its nature or manner. Accordingly, we find that Lydia first *heard* the word, the Lord then opened her heart, "that she *attended* to the things which were spoken." If then the word be not the *instrumental cause* of regeneration, why was it, in these instances, and in every other recorded

in scripture, first spoken? It is then clearly manifest that a law work upon the intellectual faculties is, at least, in the order of nature, a necessary antecedent to regeneration. Without this, men are alive to a false hope, founded in their own fancied righteousness: "I was alive without the law."

XI. The doctrine of this chapter is farther confirmed by several expressions in Ps. 119. "Thy word hath quickened me," ver. 50. It is admitted this passage has a direct reference to the renewal of the believer's decayed exercise of grace: still no good reason can be assigned for excluding the idea of grace in its first communication to the soul. For the Hebrew word here translated *quickened,* is the same that is translated *liveth,* in the often repeated phrase of scripture,—"as the Lord *liveth.*" While, however, the 50th verse has a primary reference to a renewed exercise of grace, the 93d verse has obviously a direct reference to the regenerating act: "I will never forget thy precepts: for *with them,* thou hast quickened me." Hence, he adds, in the next verse,—"I am thine." But the 130th verse is still more explicit:—"The entrance of thy

word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." When is it that sinners receive "light in the Lord?" Certainly in the regenerating act; and it is here explicitly said that the entrance of the word gives this light. When do sinners, who are denominated fools in scripture, become wise? Certainly in the regenerating act; and it is here said that the word gives wisdom to fools: "It giveth understanding unto the simple." It is then obviously a perversion of scripture to restrict this passage to the progressive work of grace in sanctification. Those who deny this construction of the 93d verse, may be required to show when divine light is first communicated to the soul. If it be not first IN the regenerating act, then regeneration does not include divine illumination. The soul is not enlightened by that act. This is admitted by Inquiro, who tells us that the Spirit "first gives the new heart, and then writes the law upon the heart." Thus he expressly contradicts the apostle, who tells us that the regenerate are CREATED IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH. Divine illumination is then a constituent part of the new creation.

XII. Instrumental causality is ascribed to the word:—"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Ps. xix. 7. "Thy word hath quickened me." Ps. cxix. 5. It is "the power of God unto salvation." Rom. i. 16. Also the rod of Christ's *power;* that power by which his people are made willing. Ps. cx. 2, 3. Accordingly the saving knowledge of God is represented as the effect of writing the law upon the heart. In the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, we have a comparison between the ancient economy of the covenant as it was ratified at Sinai, and the New Testament economy. Many of those who entered into the covenant at Sinai fell through unbelief, as many still do, who profess the name of Christ. But to remove the fears and encourage the faith of true believers, the apostle assures them, verse 10, that the law, according to ancient promise, had now been written upon their hearts. Consequently, ver. 11, as the necessary effect of writing the law upon the heart, "they shall not teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me from the least to the greatest." Again: As

"it is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God." John vi. 45. It may, then, be safely concluded, in the language of a judicious divine,—"As God will have his Son honoured, in the whole progress and perfection of grace, as the meritorious cause; the efficacy of the Spirit, as the efficient cause; so he will have the word, IN EVERY STEP TO HEAVEN, honoured as the instrumental cause."*

XIII. The external call by the gospel, and the effectual call by the Spirit, the latter of which is regeneration, are conjointly expressed by the term *called*. Rom. viii. 28: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the *called* (regenerated,) according to his purpose." Verse 30: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also *called* (regenerated;) and whom he *called* (regenerated) them he also justified." &c. Heb. ix. 15: "And for this cause he is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are *called* (regenerated) might receive the promise

* Charnock.

of eternal inheritance." It is certain the term called in each of the above instances includes regeneration. For "all things" do not "work together for good" to those who are only called externally, neither are they "justified," nor do they "receive the promise of eternal inheritance." But every Calvinist will admit that regeneration is here included in the term called. And we hazard nothing by maintaining that regeneration is here expressed by the name of the instrument which the Spirit employs in effecting it, namely, the call of the gospel. This is also according to analogy; for we find the doctrine of the gospel, which, as it exhibits Christ, is the object of faith, expressed by the term faith: "Earnestly contend for the *faith*," &c. Jude 3. Here the instrument is called by the name of that which is produced by it. In Romans iv. 3, we have a case precisely parallel: "Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Here it is said that Abraham's belief, or faith, was counted to him for righteousness. But every sound divine will maintain that it was the righteousness of Christ which was counted or imputed to Abraham, and conse-

quently that the instrument is put for that which was effected by it; or that faith was imputed to Abraham as it included its object, the righteousness of Christ. The called of God, then, are the regenerated of God, which is expressive of their regeneration by the instrumentality of the gospel call. Hence the Westminster Assembly included regeneration in the phrase "effectual calling," and for this they had the authority of the Spirit of God. These *facts* ought for ever to settle the controversy about the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, with all who receive the scriptures as a revelation from God, but especially with those who have professed to receive the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, as a faithful exhibition of scriptural doctrine. The words,—"He maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means," are equally significant. They teach us, it never entered into the imagination of that venerable assembly that the Spirit of God does not employ the word in the very act of regeneration. They never entertained any other thought than that the Holy Spirit employed the word, in the application of redemption in all

its parts. And the word of God fully sustains the Assembly.

XIV. The truth is, the gospel should be considered,—1. As an *indefinite* declaration to the lost world of mankind that salvation is proffered to them through a crucified Redeemer, and as a *call* upon them to receive him and be saved. 2. As the special voice of Christ spoken immediately by the Spirit to the soul, which is always effectual. The call is addressed only in the first way, to those who reject it. In the case of the regenerate, it is addressed in *both* these ways. The indefinite call is expressed in these words:—"Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man;" Prov. viii. 4, and almost every where throughout the scriptures. Concerning this call, our Lord says,—"Because I have *called* and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh, &c. Prov. i. 24—26. The special call we have in these words:—"Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and that formed thee, O Israel,

Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Isaiah xliii. 1. To call one by name certainly denotes a special and immediate call. Again, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my *called*." Isaiah xlviii. 12. This special call is always the *efficient will* of God; the former is only his *declarative* will. But this special call always comes to adults of sane mind IN the indefinite call; at least there is not a hint in the Bible, nor a solitary example, that it ever came in any other way; but many indubitable proofs that this is the only way. Hence when the Spirit of God comes speaking in that word, which perhaps had been often heard by the ear and received into the intellect,—"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead," (Eph. v. 14,) the soul lives. Thus God calls things which are not, and they are. But, "*How shall* they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Rom. x. 14. Hence, "We testify against the blasphemy of those on the one hand, who, pretending to hold by the word, deny and ridicule the work of the Spirit, in opening and applying it to the hearers of the gospel: and that of those, on the other

hand, who, under pretence of magnifying the work of the Spirit, despise and neglect the word, by which he works in *renewing* and *calling* sinners, and in preparing believers for the inheritance of the saints in light."*

XV. "But God is pleased to help us, when at a stand, to go on forward, by revealing two means or instruments whereby his Spirit accomplisheth the mystical union and fellowship between Christ and us, and whereby rational creatures are capable of attaining thereunto by his Spirit working in them.

"One of these means is the *gospel* of the grace of God; wherein God doth make known to us the unsearchable riches of Christ, and Christ in us, the hope of glory, Eph. iii. 8, Col. i. 27; and doth also invite us and command us to believe on Christ for his salvation, and doth encourage us by a free promise of that salvation, to all that believe on him, Acts xiv. 31, Rom. x. 9, 11.—This is God's own instrument of conveyance, wherein he sendeth Christ to us, to bless us with his salvation, Acts iii. 26. It is the ministration of the Spirit and of righ-

* Testimony of the Associate Presbyterian Church, p. 143.

teousness, 2 Cor. iii. 6, 8, 9. Faith cometh by the hearing of it; and therefore it is the great instrument whereby we are begotten in Christ, and he is formed in us, Rom. x. 16, 17. 1 Cor. iv. 15. Gal. iv. 19.—There is no need for us, to say in our hearts, 'Who will ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above? or, who shall descend into the deep, to bring Christ up from the dead,' that we may be united, and have fellowship with him in his death and resurrection? for, *the word is nigh to us*, the gospel, the word of faith in which Christ himself graciously condescendeth to be nigh to us; so that we may come at him there, without going any farther, if we desire to be joined to him, Rom. x. 6, 7, 8.

"The other of these means is *faith*, that is wrought in us by the gospel. This is our instrument of reception whereby the union between Christ and us is accomplished on our part, by our actual receiving Christ himself, with all his fulness, into our heart; which is the principal subject of the present explanation."*

* Marshall on Sanctification, pp. 67, 68.

XVI. Grace and peace are given to sinners *through* the knowledge of God. 2 Pet. i. 2. Men escape the pollutions of the world through the instrumentality of this knowledge. 2 Pet. ii. 20. The knowledge of God is eternal life. John xvii. 3. The word is a fire to melt, and a hammer to break in pieces the sinner's rocky heart. Jer. xxiii. 29. Yea, it is the "word of life." Phil. ii. 16. Because it is that word of truth which is able to make men wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim. iii. 15. It is indeed only as an instrument in the hand of the Spirit that the word is efficacious. But those who deny its instrumentality must either contradict those scriptures which ascribe causality to it, or they must take the New School side of the question, and admit this causality to be efficacious. For as causality is certainly ascribed to the word, it must be either instrumental or efficacious. We prefer that view, which gives to the word an instrumental causality. Because it harmonizes all those passages of scripture which speak of the application of redemption, and enables us to answer satisfactorily the arguments of those who ascribe a saving efficacy

to the word independent of the work of the Spirit. The doctrine maintained by us is obviously the true scriptural medium, between Arminian free will on the one hand, and fatalism on the other; and between an enthusiastic rejection of means on the one hand, and an Atheistical dependence upon them on the other.

XVII. Many other passages of scripture might be introduced to confirm still farther the doctrine of this chapter; but it is not judged expedient to burden the mind of the reader with unnecessary evidence in support of a position clearly proved.

After the mass of testimony already exhibited it would extend the work beyond due bounds to quote authorities which might be adduced to an almost indefinite extent. The mention of a few names who have maintained the principal doctrines of this Essay, will answer every practical purpose, such as, Calvin, Beza, Turretine, Marck, Witsius, Manton, Marshall, Owen, Howe, Flavel, Guise, Charnock, Boston, Brown, Gib, the Erskines, Fisher, Lawson, Dick, Witherspoon, Anderson and Shaw. The same doctrine is also intro-

duced into all the Confessions of the Reformed Churches, in some more, in others less explicitly. And in "A Warning against Unitarian and Hopkinsian Errors," issued in 1826, by the *Associate Synod of North America*, we find the following language p. 25:—"Sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, are raised from their grave by Almighty power; but that power is put forth in "the voice of the Son of God." The dry bones in the valley of vision are made to live; but it is by the prophet's prophesying at the command of God. Wherefore, we conclude, that, while no means can avail by any virtue in them, or without the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying them; yet this power of his is put forth through the instrumentality of those means which infinite wisdom has prescribed; and these are such as address the *understanding immediately*, and the heart through the understanding."

## CHAPTER III.

### OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

To banish all reasonable doubt from the minds of serious inquirers after the way of truth and salvation, it seems necessary that the most plausible objections brought against the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, should be met and refuted.

I. It is objected, "if the Spirit employ the word, he cannot act *immediately* upon the soul." Immediate action of divine power is entirely consistent with the employment of instruments, or second causes; though the *manner* is difficult to be understood; because it is above, though not inconsistent with reason. Who ever supposed the employment of instrumentality in natural generation to be inconsistent with immediate divine action? Because instrumentality is employed, does the instrumentality therefore create us? Why then suppose the immediate action of divine

power any more inconsistent with instrumentality, in regeneration, than it is in natural generation? "When we say, that those who have begotten us, according to the flesh, are our fathers, it is an improper kind of speech: for no mortal creature deserveth this so high and excellent dignity: yet so it is, that God of his singular goodness advanceth men to this so high a step, that he wills that they be called father: and he doth it to this end and purpose, that they should acknowledge themselves to be so much more bound unto him. Well, there is no great doubt as touching this present life, but we call those who have begotten children, fathers according to the flesh; but it seemeth that God is the only father of our souls, in such sort that it cannot be given to men, and yet notwithstanding the reason is all one. Why so. It is true, it is God only that BEGETTETH US BY HIS WORD, yet notwithstanding he calleth the church our mother."* The *immediate, secret, effectual, ineffable* working of the Almighty, both in nature and grace, we are called upon to believe on

* Calvin's Sermons on 1 Tim. p. 9.

the testimony of God, and the evidence we have of its effects. On the same evidence we believe the instrumentality of the word in regeneration: by it God calls things from non-existence, as though they already were, and they are: they come at his bidding. But the *manner* of this, who shall declare? Surely, not that earth-worm, called man. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Certainly, no man in this life, and probably no creature, shall ever be able to explain this mystery. But this we know, that God's working in the application of redemption to his people is not such as to destroy the instrumental efficacy of means. Yet, "vain man would be wise, though born like the wild ass's colt."

II. It is objected that "if the word operate, the soul must act." "For the word cannot be said to operate as an instrument in the production of that, the existence of which is necessary in order to its operation." To this, it may be replied, if the *soul* employed the word, in the first act of regeneration, this argument might be admitted: but inasmuch as the soul is passive, and it is the *Spirit* that employs the word, the objection is foreign to the question.

Cannot the Spirit of God act by means, unless the sinner have the power in himself rightly to employ those means? So says the objection; but it aims a direct blow against all means in the application of redemption. For the believer never has power in himself to make a right use of means. Consequently, the objection amounts to a limitation of divine power by human inability; and is, therefore, Arminianism.

III. It is objected that if the word be the instrument in regeneration, it must be effected by a more powerful presentation of it to those who are regenerated than to others, and consequently regeneration is effected by the moral suasion of the word. There is, no doubt, a more powerful presentation of the word by the Spirit of God to the regenerate, than to others; so powerful, as to change the moral nature and capacity of the soul, as well as the choice of the will. But this power is infinitely *above mere* moral suasion, though not inconsistent with it.

IV. It is objected,—"The word cannot be the instrument, because it has in itself no efficacy." It is replied,—"If God has appointed means ineffectual in themselves, he intends to

make them effectual,"* upon all whom he regenerates.

V. It is objected, there is no more *adaptation* in the word to regenerate, than there is in positive institutions to produce the effects which divine power caused to follow their observance; consequently, obedience to those things in the word which are moral in their nature proceeds entirely on the same principle with obedience to positive institutions, namely, the authority of God. Therefore, there can be no adaptation in the word, to regenerate, because there is no adaptation in positive institutions to produce their effects. To this, it is replied,—That although the authority of God is the formal reason of all obedience, still the word has in itself not only a *suitableness*, but also a tendency to accomplish the work to which it has been appointed by Jehovah.† "My word shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it,"

* Lawson.

† This adaptation has been fully demonstrated in Part I. Chap. iii. sections 7, 8, 9, 20, 21, 22, and elsewhere in the present essay.

Is. lv. 11. "It is evident, that the gospel, considered simply as a moral means, and independently of the divine constitution, which has connected the influence of the Spirit with the preaching of it, possesses a *fitness*, an adaptation to the end proposed, which is not to be found in any other part of the word."*

VI. It is objected—"That there can be no adaptation in the soul to be operated upon by the instrumentality of the word, because it is "dead in trespasses and sins." It is replied, that death in trespasses and sins is a moral or spiritual death; the loss of the *holy*, not the *mental* nature; of the *moral*, not the *intellectual* power. The latter of which, always remains in the soul, and constitutes the basis of free-agency and accountability. And is most admirably adapted to be operated upon by the word, which the Associate Synod say, is "addressed to the *understanding*." But the whole of the first part of the present work is a refutation of this objection.

VII. It is admitted that the word is the *organ* of regeneration, while its instrumentality

* Dick's Theology, Vol. ii. p. 351.

is denied. This is highly disingenuous. It is running away from the point by a paltry artifice; always perplexing to the unlearned and disgusting to men of sense. What is the difference between *organ* and instrument? The term organ denotes, "a natural instrument." The term instrument denotes, "the means of conveyance or communication."* We shall not characterize the distinction which has been made between the words organ and instrument in order to mislead the public mind on a point of such vitality; but leave it to the judgment of the reader; simply observing, that it is utterly incomprehensible, how the word can be the organ and yet not be employed "in the very act of regeneration," as the objector has asserted. It is equally incomprehensible, how the word can be the organ of regeneration, if God first regenerates the soul and afterwards writes the law upon the heart, as the objector asserts. Is the word only the medium in which the Spirit conveys himself from one object to another? Such a thought be far from the minds of sober Christians. Sound writers never thought of this sage distinction. They use the terms

* Consult Johnson, Walker and Webster.

instrument, organ, chariot, and vehicle without any apparent difference of meaning, simply to express the great scriptural doctrine that the Holy Spirit always employs the word in the regeneration of adults who are of sane mind. It cannot be known by us whether insane persons are regenerated, during insanity, or not. If so, their case resembles that of infants.

VIII. It is said,—"The word is instrumental in the production of the creature, viewed as in a state of perfect formation, which is not the case, until it has seen the light and put forth incipient acts." It is replied, according to this objection, the fœtus is brought into a state of perfect formation, without any means whatever, but *after* it "has seen the light," which cannot be till *after* it has been born, then it is begotten, and *means* are used to bring it forth. A new theory, truly, both of generation and regeneration!

IX. The objector admits that some passages have the *appearance* of proving the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, but thinks he has quoted others which establish his position, and that it is too much to demand of him a reconciliation of these apparently contradic-

tory passages. In reply, it is admitted that cases may occur in which we cannot be justly required to reconcile apparent discrepancies, because they may lie beyond our reach. We are not called upon to reconcile to the apprehension of men, "liberty and necessity," or the freedom of the human will with divine sovereignty. But we may not give such an explanation of the one as to contradict the other. Neither can we receive an exposition of any given passage of scripture which contradicts any other passage; because scripture is not inconsistent with itself. And there is such a thing to be observed as the analogy of faith, in all expositions of scripture. It is certain, the scriptures do teach the doctrine of an immediate action of divine power upon the soul in regeneration. It is, also, equally certain, they teach the doctrine that the Spirit of God employs the word in, and subsequently to the regenerating act. Yea, that he employs the word in the whole application of redemption. But the work is supernatural; and the only difficulty here is, the vanity of the human mind audaciously intruding into things which it hath not seen.*

* See Section I. of this chapter.

X. It is objected that the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word "strengthens Pelagianism," "because if the understanding perceives the things of the word to be good, the will must choose those things." This objection is based on the implied admission, that depravity is limited to the understanding; and that all that is necessary to effect regeneration is, that the understanding should be enlightened; for, says Whitby, and Inquiro with him,—"If an object be viewed as good by our understanding, the will chooses it." Thus the intelligent reader will perceive that this objection imbodies the very essence of the Arminian doctrine of free will. But it has been answered in Part I. Chapter III. Sections 16—18. The will is so depraved that it not only effectually resists all outward means, but also the testimony of conscience.* But does this depravity of the will deprive God either of the *right* or the *power* to employ means himself, and also to require the sinner to employ them in the application of redemption? The objection we are considering admits that the sinner's inabi-

* See 16th and 17th Sections, just referred to.

lity deprives God both of the right and power to employ means. But this admission at once gives the whole field to the Arminians. The scriptures, however, teach a different doctrine. From them we learn that neither God's *right* to appoint, nor his power to employ means can be affected in the least by man's inability: and that, in the application of redemption, *God quickens the dead, and calls those things which are not as though they were.* Rom. iv. 17. Hence, says Calvin,—"Faith has a perpetual relation to the word, and can no more be separated from it, than the rays from the sun, whence they proceed." And this is equally true, whether we contemplate faith as it is communicated by the Spirit of God, in the regenerating act, or as it is the exercise of the believer. Neither does the doctrine of the *perfection* of the gospel, *as a means*, give any support to the Arminian doctrine of its *efficacy, as a cause.* "As God is infinitely holy in his own nature, every discovery that he has made to any of his creatures, must carry this impression upon it, *and have a tendency to promote holiness in them.*"* Therefore we cannot surrender the doctrines

* Witherspoon.

of God's holy word because Arminians pervert them.

XI. Farther: Regeneration is so secret, mysterious, and imperceptible, even to the subjects of it, that few, perhaps none, can tell the precise moment when it was effected upon them. They *know* it only by its effects. Who among the Lord's people can tell the very moment in which they passed from a state of legal, to a state of evangelical repentance? But that was the moment of their new birth. Who among them have any consciousness of the least salutary influence upon their minds, either before or after conversion, which was not produced either *directly* or *indirectly* by means of the word? If any suggestions, respecting divine things have been made to their minds by the Spirit, even those which were *occasioned* by some providential event, they have come through the medium of the word. Otherwise, these suggestions could not be from the Spirit of God; but from Satan, or a depraved heart: for "the Spirit acts not without the word." Consequently, a denial of the instrumentality of the word opens the door for the Mystics, who held "that reason comprehended the principles of divine truth." For truth must either

be inherent in the mind, or communicated by inspiration, or it is not included in regeneration, if the word be not the instrument. But, in the application of redemption by means of the word, the Spirit manifests infinite condescension to our weakness. He puts into our hands the pattern of the work which he performs upon our souls. The word is not only the medium of conveyance, but its doctrine is one of the things conveyed in the regenerating act: so that the knowledge of God, which is in the souls of the regenerate is perfect in kind, however imperfect it may be in degree. Hence, the word is the infallible test of the Spirit's saving work, demonstrating its genuineness, and detecting every species of counterfeit.

XII. It is objected, if the word be the seed of regeneration, "its very name supposes an operation *prior* to its own" operation. In reply, it may be inquired, does the operation of heat and moisture, which gives activity to the seed, take place *prior* to the sowing, or *without* the seed? If not, then why maintain that there is, in regeneration, an operation by the Spirit, directly upon the soul, prior to the implantation of the word? Or why maintain

that activity is given to the word prior to its implantation in the soul? According to this reasoning, the word is made to operate before it is employed. That is, the seed grows and the ground is made productive before the seed is sown! and after the plant has sprung up, that is, "seen the light, and put forth incipient acts," then the seed is sown! However ludicrous this argument may appear, it fails to excite, even a smile, when it is seen that the word of God is seriously introduced to give it currency. Luke viii. 8, 15, and Heb. xi. 11, are perverted to this unworthy purpose.

1. The passage in Luke reads thus:—"Other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold. . . . That on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." To this objection it is replied,—If the reader will turn to his bible and read the intermediate verses between the 8th, and 15th, he will perceive that our Lord, under the metaphor of ground, is speaking of the different *effects* produced by the word upon the regenerate and unregenerate. In the former, it produces fruit, v. 15. In the

latter, it is unproductive. Again: these unproductive persons, are divided into three classes. 1. Ground by the way-side, ver. 12. 2. Rock, ver. 13. 3. Ground already full of thorns, ver. 14. Thus, sinners are either so hackneyed in the vices of the world, or their consciences are so seared by often repeated acts of transgression, or their moral sense is so obtuse and obstinate, or they are so completely involved in the pursuits and pleasures of the world, that the word can produce no salutary effect upon them; while it produces its proper effect upon the regenerate. But we find no intimation that the regenerate were changed prior to the operation of the word. Our Lord is not here speaking of regeneration, but of the different visible effects produced by the word upon the righteous and the wicked. But of the nature of regeneration, or the means by which it is effected, this parable speaks nothing. The Arminians tell us the good ground made itself good; and in support of their assertion, they quote the parable of the talents, Matt. xxv. 14—40. But this parable, like that of the sower, speaks nothing of the saving work of the Spirit, but of the common gifts, such as

the means of grace, together with opportunity and natural knowledge; things enjoyed by all who live under a dispensation of the gospel, and which, like the extraordinary *gifts* of the Spirit, in the apostolic age, may be possessed in the highest degree; and yet those who possess them, may be nothing better than "a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." 1 Cor. xiii. 1. Consequently, the interpretation which the objector has given to the parable of the sower is not only unscriptural, but enthusiastic.

2. The passage Heb. xi. 11, reads thus:— "Through faith, also, Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." It is sufficient to observe here, that Sarah's faith, respecting a son, included in it the faith of miracles, as it was faith in the promise of God to perform a miracle.* But as it also included saving faith, it is a suitable example to illustrate the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word

* For an explanation of the faith of miracles, see Guise, on 1 Cor. xiii. 2. Also Macknight on 1 Cor. xii. 9.

in regeneration. For her faith was produced through the instrumentality of the promise,—"The Lord visited Sarah AS HE HAD SAID, and the Lord did unto Sarah AS HE HAD SPOKEN." Gen. xxi. 1. This example then refutes the objector. For regeneration, and the grace of saving faith are inseparable, and there can be no faith without a promise. So, it is proved by this example, that faith cometh, or IS by hearing. So far as Sarah was active in the exercise of the faith by which she received strength, that activity was the *effect* of the power of faith communicated in the regenerating act.

XIII. It is farther objected in the following words: "We would like to know how the Spirit *can* act upon the truth, without acting in the *first place*, directly and immediately upon the mind, and thus qualifying it for the reception of the truth? but when this is done, a great and supernatural change is effected, *prior* to the operation of the word." The objector "would like to know" that which God has said cannot be known. But this objection contains the following proposition:—"The mind must be qualified for the active reception of the truth, before the Holy Spirit can act

upon it by the truth;" or in other words, "God cannot act by the word, unless man possess the power to co-operate with him by the word." This is Arminian logic. Says the objector, the employment of the word by the Spirit supposes a qualification in the soul to receive it.—Says Finney, The commands of God suppose ability in the soul to obey. And the Arminians say,—"In all the promises and calls of the gospel men are supposed capable to believe and repent." The objector has then assumed the principal tenet, yea, the chief corner stone of the whole Arminian system, to be true. For the Arminians say—"An almighty and invincible influence of the Holy Ghost in men's conversion to Christ, excludes all instrumentality of his word in it, which can only work by moral suasion."* This is precisely the sentiment of the objector. But he draws one inference from it, the Arminians another. They infer from it, that regeneration is effected, not by the omnipotent power of the Spirit, through the word, but by the word in the ordinary way of moral suasion. The objector infers from it, that regeneration is effected

* Brown's Divinity, p. 354.

by the omnipotent power of the Spirit without the employment of the word. But the premise being false, these conclusions, though absolutely contradictory, are equally false. To all which, it may be replied,—It is, indeed, true that the Holy Spirit does regenerate the soul prior to its *active* reception of the truth; but does it, therefore, follow that the Spirit *cannot* act upon the truth, and upon the soul by the truth, *prior* to any *ability in the soul* to act by the truth? Certainly not. Man's inability can neither destroy nor limit the power of God. Neither can man's depravity resist means which God wills to make effectual. The objection, then, imbodies the very soul of Arminianism; for it restricts God's *right* and *power* of acting to fallen man's ability. It is a concession of the whole field to the advocates of free will; an acknowledgment that Calvinism is an unscriptural absurdity; while it draws an inference opposite to Arminianism; but leading to enthusiasm.

XIV. It is asserted that James i. 18, "says nothing about a new heart." It is replied,—If this be so, it is remarkable that the whole Christian world should have failed to discover

it till the year 1842;—and the objector is entitled to the *sole* honour of its discovery. But this objection is such a direct and unequivocal contradiction of the divine word, that argument would be lost upon minds which are capable of being influenced by such naked assertions; and may well be dispensed with in the case of such as take the scriptures of truth as their infallible guide.

XV. It is alleged that Turretine denies the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration. To this it may be replied, the quotations already made from that learned author in the preceding pages, prove that he maintained the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word. He does, indeed, use one expression, which, apart from its connexion, and what he elsewhere says, might be construed, not into a denial of instrumentality, but into an admission that there is an *immediate* action of the Spirit, in the regenerating act, *distinct*, though not *separate*, from his action by the word. Whether this be so or not, is wholly unknown to us. But it is far from a denial of the word's instrumentality. In addition to the passages already quoted from Turretine, the following

may be added: The *external* and *internal* call of the gospel agree, "on the part of God, who calls; on the part of men, who are called; and on the part of the INSTRUMENT, which is ordinarily the word in each call.*

XVI. It is alleged Dr. Owen taught the doctrine that regeneration is effected without the instrumentality of the word. If this allegation were true, it would, doubtless, stagger the faith of some who acknowledge themselves much indebted to that great man for his masterly expositions of the sacred word. But it is suitable that the Dr. should speak for himself:—"The gospel is salvation efficiently; in that it is the great instrument which God is pleased to use, in and for the collation† and bestowing salvation upon his elect. Hence, the apostle calls it the "power of God unto salvation," Rom. i. 16; because God, in and by it, exerts his mighty power in the saving of them that believe; as it is again so called, 1 Cor. i. 18, whence there is a saving power ascribed unto the word itself,—As, 1. In the regeneration and sanctification of the elect, the first

* De Vocatione et Fide, Quest. I., Sect. vii.

† Conferring.

external act of this salvation. This is wrought by the word, 1 Pet. i. 23: "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God." Wherein not only the thing itself, of our regeneration by the word, but the manner of it, also, is declared. It is by the collation of a new spiritual life upon us, whereof the word is the seed. As every life proceeds from some seed, that hath in itself virtually the whole life to be educed from it, by natural ways and means, so THE WORD IN THE HEARTS OF MEN IS TURNED INTO A VITAL PRINCIPLE, that, cherished, by suitable means, puts forth vital acts and operations. By this means we are born of God and quickened, who by nature are children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins. So, Paul tells the Corinthians, that he had begotten them, in Jesus Christ, by the gospel, 1 Cor. iv. 15. I confess, it doth not do this work by any power resident in itself, and always necessarily accompanying its administration; for then all would be regenerated to whom it is preached, and there would be no neglectors of it: but it is the INSTRUMENT of God for this end, and mighty and powerful through God it is, for

the accomplishment of it. And this gives us our first real interest in the salvation, which it doth declare. Of the same use and efficacy is it in the progress of this work in our sanctification.*

XVII. It is objected that Dr. Gill, the celebrated commentator, denied the doctrine of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration. To this it may be replied that Dr. Gill is to be regarded rather as speaking hesitatingly than as peremptorily denying the doctrine. His words are,—"The instrumental cause of regeneration, if it may be so called, are the word of God and the ministers of it . . . . . Yet this instrumentality of the word in regeneration seems not so agreeable to the principle of grace implanted in the soul in regeneration, and to be understood in respect to that; since that is done by immediate infusion, and is represented as a creation. . . . . Wherefore, [the instrumentality of the word] is rather to be understood of the exertion of the principle of grace, and the drawing it forth into act and exercise. . . . . Though, after all, it seems

* Exposition of the Hebrews, vol. iii. pp. 313, 314.

plain that the ministry of the word is the vehicle in which the Spirit of God conveys himself and his grace into the hearts of men, which is done when the word comes not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost."* On this passage of Dr. Gill, it may be remarked, —1. "*The word is the vehicle,*" &c. How the word can be the vehicle and not be the instrument, or rather not be employed as the objector has asserted, may be safely left to the solution of those profound metaphysicians, who can so easily tell *how* the word operates in regeneration.—2. The Dr.'s peculiar and erroneous views respecting the gospel call, which he restricted to "sensible sinners," would naturally lead him to speak in the above hesitating manner. For if the gospel offer be not made to dead sinners, it cannot, of course, be the means of their regeneration. 3. The Dr. was evidently philosophising when he penned the above paragraph. For in his Commentary, we find the following language— "The word of truth is made use of as a means of begetting souls again." "The gospel is the

* Gill's Body of Divinity, vol. ii. pp. 114, 115.

word of truth, and by this souls are begotten and born again." The authority of Dr. Gill, then, is, indeed, a slender foundation on which to rest a denial of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration.

XVIII. The authority of Dr. Ridgley is arrayed against us, with an unusual degree of confidence. His words are—"I cannot but conclude that it [regeneration] is wrought in us without the instrumentality of the word, or any of the ordinary means of grace; because it is necessary, from the nature of the thing, to our *receiving*, *improving*, or *reaping* any saving advantage by the word, that the Spirit should produce the principle of faith; and to say that this is done by the word, is in effect to assert that the word produces the principle and the principle gives efficacy to the word; which seems to me little less than reasoning in a circle."* Respecting Dr. Ridgley it may be observed: 1. Although his system of Divinity contains much that is excellent, still he was far from being a sound divine. He denied the eternal Sonship of our Lord; and has ever

* Ridgley's Divinity, Vol. iii. p. 46.

been a favourite author with semi-Pelagians and Hopkinsians. 2. He has given us no authority either human or divine to sustain his sentiment on this vitally important subject. 3. He has changed the terms of his argument. He truly asserts the *passivity* of the soul in the regenerating act; and then, as will be perceived by attending to his words above, which are placed in italic characters, reasons from its activity after regeneration. But it is one thing to say that the *soul* must be made active by divine power, before it can *improve* the word, and quite another thing to say the Holy Spirit cannot employ his own word, in making the soul active, unless the soul have power to act. If reduced to the proper form of an argument, the Dr's. reasoning would read something in the following style: In regeneration the soul is *passive:* In order to *improve* by regenerating grace, it must become active: Therefore the Holy Spirit cannot employ the word in making the soul active. Or thus: The soul must be active in order to reap any advantage from the word: In regeneration the soul is passive: Therefore the *Spirit of God* cannot employ the word in the regenerating act. Such a change

of terms is certainly no better than reasoning in a circle. But it is the old Arminian argument that God's power to act in the application of redemption is limited by the natural man's ability of will. Thus men make God dependent upon his creatures.

XIX. But we know not how better to conclude these answers to objections, than to adopt the language of Calvin: "Their cavilling objection, that we depend on the 'letter that killeth,' shows, that they have not escaped the punishment due to the despisers of the scripture..... The apostle calls his preaching 'the ministration of the Spirit,' (2 Cor. iii. 8,) doubtless intending that the Holy Spirit so adheres to his own truth, which he hath expressed in the scriptures, that he only displays and exerts his power where the word is received with due reverence and honour." Nor is this repugnant to what I before asserted, that the word itself hath not much certainty with us, unless when confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit. For the Lord hath established a kind of mutual connexion between the certainty of his word and of his Spirit: so that our minds are filled with a solid reverence for the word,

when by the light of the Spirit we are enabled therein to behold the divine countenance: and, on the other hand, without the least fear of mistake, we gladly receive the Spirit when we recognise him in his image, that is, in the word. . . . . What answer can be given to these things, by those proud fanatics, who think themselves possessed of the only valuable illumination, when, securely neglecting and forsaking the divine word, they, with equal confidence and temerity, greedily embrace every reverie which their distempered imaginations may have conceived? A very different sobriety becomes the children of God; who, while they are sensible that, exclusively of the Spirit of God, they are utterly destitute of the light of truth, yet are not ignorant that the word is the instrument, by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of his Spirit. For they know no other Spirit, than that who dwelt in and spake by the apostles; by whose oracles they are continually called to the hearing of the word."*

* Institutes, B. I., C. ix., S. 3.

# CHAPTER IV.

## THE VIEW OF DR. RIDGLEY REFUTED BY AN ANONYMOUS WRITER.

The author regrets his inability to give the name of the writer, who has so ably and satisfactorily refuted Dr. Ridgley's opinion, that the word cannot be the instrument of regeneration. The article first appeared in the third volume of the RELIGIOUS MONITOR, in 1827. It is believed the cause of truth will be a gainer by the insertion of his main arguments in the present volume:

"Observing lately, upon reading Dr. Ridgley's Body of Divinity, on the subject of regeneration, a sentiment advanced by the Dr. upon that subject, which, in my opinion, is very exceptionable; and a sentiment, which, as far as is known to the writer of this paper, was never maintained before by any who passed for orthodox on the general and leading doctrines of the gospel,—as the Dr. will be considered as an authority by many on subjects of this kind, and as the work is, by a late extensive edition

of it, published in this country, put into the hands of great numbers, and something like the sentiment advanced by the Dr. begins to make its appearance in some of the publications of modern times, whose character for orthodoxy is not disputed, I concluded it might perhaps be of service to some of your readers to send my thoughts upon the sentiment advanced by him, to your useful miscellany for insertion, if you deem them worthy of a place there.

What we dislike in the account the Dr. gives of this saving work of God upon the soul, is that he makes regeneration to take place without the instrumentality of the word, or any of the ordinary means of grace; and his arguments to prove that this is indeed the case, we consider to be very inconclusive, and involved in great obscurity, if not founded upon mistaken views of the nature of a work of grace in the soul, both in regeneration, and in progressive sanctification. They are—

1st. "That it is necessary, from the nature of the thing, to our receiving, improving, or reaping any advantage by the word, that the Spirit should produce the principle of faith; and to say that this is done by the word, is, in

effect, to assert that the word produces the principle, and the principle gives efficacy to the word; which seems to me (he says) little less than reasoning in a circle." When he says that the Spirit produces the principle of faith, we understand him and agree with him; but when he asserts that this is produced without the instrumentality of the word, we cannot agree with him, for reasons which may appear afterwards. What claims our notice now, is the manner in which he attempts to prove it. "To say that this is done by the word is, in effect, to assert that the word produces the principle, and the principle gives efficacy to the word." A clear statement of the view taken by those who assert that the word is the instrument in this work will, to any unprejudiced mind, at once do away the difficulty. For though the word, according to them, produces the principle, yet it does not this of itself, but by the Spirit giving an efficacy unto it for that express purpose: or in other words, the Spirit giving an efficacy to the word, both produces the principle in regeneration, and carries the principle implanted, into operation afterwards; so that there is no arguing in a

circle here. But the expression, "the principle gives efficacy to the word," which seems to be designed to represent his own view of the way in which the word becomes at all useful, either in regeneration, or in the progress of the work of sanctification in believers, represents something which appears utterly unintelligible upon the principles of sound theology; because sound theology teaches us, that it is the Spirit that gives all the efficacy to the word. The word is said to be "mighty through God" for pulling down strong holds, &c., and not through any inward principle or any thing in man. We only take notice of this expression to show, that there is some reason to believe, that the Dr. had got into that sentiment by means of some incorrect views he had concerning the Spirit's work in general, or felt it not a little difficult to support it in any degree of consistency with what correct views he had of the truth.

The 2d argument is, "the word cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith, and faith cannot be put forth unless it proceed from a principle of grace implanted, therefore this principle of grace is not produced by it: we may as

well suppose (he says) that the presenting a beautiful picture before a man that is blind, can enable him to see; or, the violent motion of a withered hand produce strength for action, as we can suppose that the presenting the word, in an objective way, is the instrument whereby God produces that internal principle by which we are enabled to embrace it." Admitting that the principle of faith in regeneration goes before the act of faith which is produced by it, we see no reason why the instrumentality of the word may not be considered as used in the implanting of that principle, as well as in promoting the believer's sanctification afterwards: for that principle of grace, is just the understanding enlightened, the will renewed, &c.; and how can this be in any adult person, capable of exercising these faculties, without the word, by which the Holy Spirit operates to the enlightening of the one, and directing and influencing the other? The argument from the necessity of the word being mixed with faith in order to our attaining any real and certain benefit from it, if of force in the use he makes of it, would prove too much for the Dr. himself, because he grants that the word is the in-

strument whereby the Spirit carries on the work of sanctification. But this argument would go as far to prove that sanctification is carried on without the instrumentality of the word, as it will to prove that regeneration is effected without its instrumentality; because, even in sanctification, the word cannot be mixed with faith, but by the Spirit's working this faith in us, or leading the principle implanted in regeneration, into action, as appears from Song i. 4, and iv. 6, and many other passages of scripture; and therefore, the Spirit's work here must go before that faith which improves the word for sanctification. But how does the Spirit draw out the principle into action, in the believer's sanctification? It is by the word, and by that same word, we may conclude, he begets faith in the first exercise of it, and the principle which produces it; making the word the instrument by which he operates in effecting that great and important change upon the sinner. The two comparisons used by the Dr. may be turned with good advantage against himself; because, though a beautiful picture placed before a man that is blind could not give him sight, it might be the means of even

doing this, if it was intended by the Almighty to be so. We are told in scripture of a thing, altogether as unlikely, made a means, through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, of causing a blind man to see: we refer to the circumstance mentioned in the gospels of a blind man cured by our Lord, by simply anointing his eyes with clay. The violent motion of the withered hand, as the mere action of the arm that wields it, cannot, it must be allowed, produce strength for action in the hand itself, yet we read of a man who was commanded to stretch out his withered hand, and a power, which went along with the word, communicated the ability, so that he stretched it out, and it was made whole as the other. And what might hinder the word, though unequal of itself to give sight to the spiritually blind, and life to the dead sinner, to be the instrument, in the hand of the Spirit, for these important purposes?

The 3d argument, is contained in the following words: "Neither would this so well agree with the idea of its being a new creature, or our being created unto good works; for then, it ought rather to be said, we are

created by faith, which is a good work; this is to say, that the principle of grace is produced by the instrumentality of that which supposes its being implanted, and is the result and consequence thereof." There is no seeming inconsistency between considering the believer, in virtue of the regenerating principle he is made a partaker of, as a new creature, and affirming that this change, which is passed upon him, was effected by the instrumentality of the word: because, as the first creation of all things was effected by a word of Almighty power, (for in bringing the world into existence, from a state of nonentity, "he spake, and it was done, he commanded, and all things stood fast,") so the new creation is accomplished by the word of the gospel, made the power of God for the salvation of those who are its subjects, and begetting faith in them, that they may embrace Christ as the great salvation, and the principle of faith and every other grace. That a work of God, whether of nature or of grace, may be entitled to the character of a creation work, it is not requisite that it be accomplished without means, and our asserting that the word is the instrument, in what is

called the new creation, is accordingly without that absurdity the Dr. would attach to it. Our admitting, too, that this new creation is effected by the instrumentality of the word generally, lays no ground for the assertion, that then we would be created by faith ; because, though the word cannot profit without faith, yet faith does not go before, but follows the word, which both begets the act of faith and the principle which produces it, being, in the hand of the Spirit, the instrument for this purpose.

Having presented his arguments to prove that regeneration is accomplished without the instrumentality of the word, he tries to account for the other way of thinking on this subject. "I am ready (he says) to conjecture that what leads many divines into this way of thinking, is the sense in which they understand the words of the Apostle, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." 1 Pet. i. 23, and elsewhere, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." James i. 16. Whereas, this does not so much respect the implanting the prin-

ciple of grace, as it does our being enabled to act from that principle; and it is as though he should say, he hath made us believers, or induced us to love and obey him, by the word of truth, which supposes a principle of grace to have been implanted: otherwise the word of truth would never have produced these effects. Regeneration may be taken not only for our being made alive unto God, or created unto good works, but for our putting forth living actions proceeding from that principle which is implanted in the soul. I am far from denying that faith and all other graces are wrought in us, by the instrumentality of the word; and it is in this sense, that some who treat on this subject, explain their sentiments when they speak of being born again by the word." Of consequence, according to the Dr., regeneration, strictly speaking, and the new birth, are quite distinct things, according to any conception we are to form of them; and the new birth is not to be referred to that change which takes place when the sinner is brought from nature to grace, nor to be restricted to any given period of time, but is a thing which is taking place every day; according as the believer is carried

out by new supplies of grace, he attains to the practice of duty. "*It is* (he says) *our being enabled to act from that principle:* and it is as though he should say, he hath made us believers or *induced us to love and obey him by the word of truth:*" which is but what God is doing by his Spirit upon his people every day, by means of his word, and various other ordinances of his grace. And lest we should misunderstand him, and conclude that he intends only to show, that the Apostle meant, that only those who are born again can do good actions, but that he means something more than this, he adds, "Regeneration may be taken, not only for our being made alive to God, &c. *but for our putting forth living actions,*" attempting to prove thereby, that these passages, if they respect regeneration at all, it must be in this very extended sense of the word. It is some such a kind of new birth as the Arminians receive into their creed, which they may have and lose, and which rises and falls as they stand or fall from grace; for in the language of the Dr. being born again, may be taken, for *our putting forth living actions, proceeding from that principle.* But this the be-

liever does not always, or at least sometimes he does it in so small a degree that it is scarcely perceptible. He is sometimes more, sometimes less active, spiritually, as the measure of grace is, which is given to him, according to the gift of Christ.

There is only one way by which, when he asserts that to be born again is, our being enabled to act from that principle implanted in regeneration, he can be supposed to mean, with any shade of consistency with himself, that the new birth is a work of God which takes place at one and the same moment of time, and that is by allowing him to consider it as an ability given by God, to exercise the principle implanted in regeneration, (for he says it is different from regeneration properly so called,) which man continues ever after, unaided of God, to put forth of himself, so that he is like a clock, that put together by its maker and set in motion, moves by a power inherent in itself; because, if the ability of the Christian to act from that principle, is by continued supplies of grace, and more or less, as these supplies are granted, it could not be one act of God, but a continued acting or a succession of

acts, in the way of communicating that ability. But as he says it *may be taken* for the putting forth of living actions, this seems to put it beyond a doubt, that according to him, it is not to be confined to any given time, or particular act of God, towards the sinner. So much with respect to the Dr.

The Editor of the Philadelphia edition, in a foot note, defends the sentiment and advances some things equally as exceptionable concerning this first work of the Spirit of God upon the soul.—"No intervention (he says) of second causes seems necessary.—The Spirit of God is the agent; the soul of man is the subject of influence; and he is said to open the heart, to give a new heart, to create anew, to enlighten the mind in the knowledge of the truth, to work in us to will and to do; or to give sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. From such expressions, it may be gathered that sight, knowledge, new dispositions, and a change of inclinations, are the effect of regeneration, not the thing itself." Again: "If the Holy Spirit acts no otherwise than by motives, angelic natures do this also, and no more power is ascribed to the Searcher of

hearts than to them." He makes it to be entirely a physical change, and seems to mistake the view of those who hold that the Spirit of God, in regeneration, uses the instrumentality of the word. For it is not their opinion, that the Holy Spirit acts no otherwise than by addressing motives to the soul, in regeneration. On the contrary, they maintain, that while he addresses with motives, he exerts a power, in producing this change, through the word, so as these motives take their effect; and this is the sole reason, according to them, why the same motives presented to every hearer of the gospel, which are lost upon many, to others have an efficacy in them, to draw them to Christ. But this will be considered afterwards."

After a very able argument in defence of the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, this author concludes the whole thus:—

"We shall close this paper with mentioning two objections which may be brought forward against all we have said on the subject, and giving a reply to them; the rest of the objections, of any seeming consequence, having been

already attended to in our review of the Dr's. own arguments.

"The first is—that some infants are regenerated before they actually believe; and is not this a proof that the Spirit does not always act in regeneration by the instrumentality of the word, and acts in this work, as respects the implantation of the principle of grace without the word? To which we reply, that as the Lord's manner of dealing with those infants, which are the subjects of saving grace, is among the secret things which belong to himself; it cannot be a rule by which we are to judge in the case of capable subjects of actual faith, more especially when we find it declared so plainly in scripture, that it is by the instrumentality of the word he both regenerates and sanctifies the latter. Regenerated infants are subjects also of justification, though they are not capable of the actual exercise of faith in Christ, through the word exhibiting Christ to us as the Lord our righteousness; and we do not see how their being the subjects of regeneration, without the instrumentality of the word, could prove that regeneration in adults is accomplished without it; more than their

being justified, would prove that adults may be and are justified persons in the sight of God, all such as are actually justified without a receiving of Christ as the Lord their righteousness.

The second objection is—that regeneration is an instantaneous work, or rather act of God; but to suppose it to be accomplished by the word, as the means or instrument, would make it to be the result of a process of reasoning in the mind of the regenerated person, and of a process of exercise upon the word, which could not comport with its being an instantaneous act. Supposing the word to be the instrument, it can only be so by a discovery both of the person himself, and of Christ the proper object of faith therein, in order that it may be operative in producing this change, if its instrumentality is at all to be admitted in the first work of regeneration. But it may be replied, that that discovery becomes a saving discovery, only when the person sees the excellence and suitableness of Christ, the glorious object of faith, his own welcome, with the heart's approbation of the object, and appropriation of him, which is faith, or a believing

sight, because it is a sight of Christ in the way of applying the revelation which is made of him in the gospel, to his own particular case; while all that is short of this is no more than what the natural man, by a natural and common work of the Spirit may attain. And, it is so much instantaneous, as that there is no intermediate condition between this saving sight of Christ, and what may be the mere fruit of a common operation of the Spirit. But, the moment he obtains it, the change passes upon him, and the word, in the hand of the Spirit, is the instrument."

# CHAPTER V.

## EXTRACTS FROM SEVERAL APPROVED AUTHORS CONCERNING THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE WORD IN REGENERATION.

Why does the Spirit use the term calling? To denote the medium which God uses to convert men, namely, the voice of the gospel, and the proclamation of the word, than which nothing more suitable and convenient could be given to the rational creature.—*De Vocatione et Fide. Quest.* 1. *Sect.* 4.

Although the Spirit in effectual calling acts not without the word, nevertheless he acts not only mediately by the word, but also operates in the soul immediately with the word, that the call must necessarily take its effect.—*Quest.* 4. *Sect.* 23.

*On the Lord's opening of Lydia's heart, against the Remonstrants.*

"It is in vain that it should be laid down here, that this opening of the heart can also be effected by the word, as it is elsewhere said, Acts xxvi. 18, 'That Paul was sent to the Gentiles to open their eyes, and convert them from darkness to light.' Especially as it is

in such manner that it does not differ from [Lydia's] attention; but is used for one and the same thing, as God is said to have opened her heart, when she attended to the words of Paul: nothing else is intimated, than, that the preaching of Paul was efficacious, and that the praise of its efficacy must be ascribed to God, the first moving cause of all things. For although the opening of the heart is in this manner ascribed *objectively* to the word, as far as it can be done by a moral cause; because it is not accustomed to be done without the word, but according to its presence; and it is ascribed instrumentally to the ministers of the word, because they are the organs which God uses for this work. It cannot, however, be effected simply by the word, or by the word of God proposed by men, unless the Holy Spirit add a distinct internal power by the word. This intervention through the word externally proposed to the mind is received with faith by her. This Luke distinctly notices, when he says, she first heard Paul, that is, it [the opening of the heart] came between his preaching, and her receiving the word. Because, indeed, the preacher brings it in vain to the ears, unless the Creator open the heart, and the word knocks in vain against the door of the heart closed by unbelief and ignorance, unless, by the grace of God, it should be opened; therefore, he adds, that God opened her heart, that

she attended to the things taught by Paul; the end and effect of this opening is noted. And so three things are distinctly enumerated, which concur in effectual calling: first, the action of Paul preaching; the action of God opening the heart, and the action of Lydia with her heart opened, and embracing the word by faith; which three things flow spontaneously from the words of Luke.—*Id. Quest.* 4. *Sect.* 36.

In treating of the new birth, which he calls a creation, resurrection, regeneration, drawing, &c., he says, "it is also expressed by illumination, doctrine, persuasion; and that both these classes of words and similes are sweetly and efficaciously conjoined in the same places, as when the spouse joins running with drawing—Song i. 2, 4." See also John vi. 44; 1 Cor. ii. 4; Eph. i. 18, 19; Jer. xx. 7;* Hosea ii. 14; 2 Cor. v. 14. After quoting these texts, he then adds: "*Hinc idem evangelium, quo convertimur, et potentia, et sapientia vocatur.*" "Hence the same gospel by which we are converted, is called both the power and the wisdom of God."—*Id. Sect.* 20.—*Turretine.*

But not one of them [the apostles of Christ] learned from his teaching to contemn the Divine word: they were rather filled with higher reverence for it; as their writings abundantly

* The word "deceived" in Jer. xx. 7, is *enticed* in the margin.

testify. This has been predicted by the mouth of Isaiah. For when he says, "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed for ever," Isa. lix. 21, he does not confine people under the old dispensation to the external letter, as though they were children learning to read; but declares that it will be the true and complete felicity of the new church, under the reign of Christ, to be governed by the word of God, as well as by his Spirit. Whence, we infer, that those persons are guilty of detestable sacrilege, by disjoining these two things which the Prophet has connected in an inviolable union.—*Calvin.*

By that same word, whereby the elect are called to communion with God and his Christ, they are regenerated to a far more excellent life.

We give this definition of it. Regeneration is that supernatural act of God, whereby a new and divine life is infused into the elect person, spiritually dead, and that from the incorruptible seed of the word of God, made fruitful by the infinite power of the Spirit.

As to adult persons, they are born again by the word of God, laying before them the deformity and misery of their natural life, or rather of their living death; and likewise the excellence of that spiritual life, of which Christ

is the Author, fountain, and pattern; pressing them also by the most powerful exhortations, that denying all carnal lusts, they may give themselves up to be new moulded and formed by the Spirit of God. And in this manner the word is to them a moral instrument of regeneration, by teaching and persuasion. But the word operates effectually in none, unless it be impregnated by the efficacy of the Spirit. To the external word must be added the internal, which is no less effectual than that word of God, whereby he commanded light to shine out of darkness.—*Witsius on the Covenants, chap.* 6. *Sec.* 1, 4, 14, 25.

"Is it not natural to love the *means* by which even my very nature itself hath been communicated to me, and by which I am what I am? It is violence to the new nature of the children of God to withhold from them the word of the gospel, which hath been instrumental to their new birth."—*Howe.*

The first principle of the new creature is faith. Faith is a part of this new creature. The new creation is an evangelical impression, and therefore corresponds in its intention with the gospel. This is the instrument whereby the creature was wrought; and this was appointed and published for the glory of God, "Glory to God in the highest."

And it was wrought in an ordinary way by instruction; for that Abraham is commended, and no doubt but Isaac and Jacob did the same; so that all along this change of the heart was wrought by a declaration of the word of the gospel.

It is necessary by God's appointment, for all the degrees of the new birth, and all the appendages to it. When God shows his own glory for a farther change, he represents the species of it in the glass of the Gospel; "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." 2 Cor. iii. 18. It is the ministration of the Spirit in all the acts of the Spirit. If the Spirit quicken, it is by some gospel precept; if it comforts, it is by some gospel promise; if it startles, it is by some threatening in the word: whatsoever working there is in the Christian's heart, it is by some word or other dropping upon it. If any temptation which assaults us be baffled, it is by the word which is the sword of the Spirit. The life of the Christian is made up of increasing lights, refreshing comforts, choicer inclinations of the heart towards God; by the same law whereby the soul is converted, the heart is rejoiced, and the eyes are farther enlightened. "The law of the Lord is perfect, cenverting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes." Psalm xix. 18. The

Spirit makes the word not only the fire to kindle the soul, but the bellows to blow; it is first life, then liveliness to the soul: it is through the word he begets us, and through the word he quickens us, "Thy word hath quickened me," Psalm cxix. 50, 93. It is by the word God gathers a church in the world, by the same word he sanctifies it to greater degrees. Eph. v. 26. It is the seed whereby we are born, the dew whereby we are refreshed. As it is the seed of our birth, so it is the milk of our growth. 1 Pet. ii. 2. Faith comes by hearing and salvation after faith by the foolishness of preaching. 1 Cor. i. 21. It helps us after we have believed through grace. Acts xviii. 27. Our fruitfulness depends upon our plantation by this river-side. The influence of other ordinances depends upon it. Sacraments that nourish and increase, are not efficacious, but by virtue of the word, they have their dependence upon the word as seals upon the covenant; the word is operative without sacraments, sacraments are not operative without the influence of the word, they are only assistants to it; this quickens and increases habitual grace, as well as it was the instrument first to usher it into the heart, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Eph. v. 26. As God will have the mediation of his Son honoured in the whole progress and perfection of grace

as the meritorious cause, the efficacy of the Spirit as the efficient cause, so he will have the word in every step to heaven honoured as the instrumental cause; that as Jesus Christ is all in all, as the chief, so the word may be all in all as the means. As God created the world by the word of his power, and by the word of his providence bid the creatures increase and multiply, so by the word of the gospel he lays the foundation and rears the building of his spiritual house.

Let the word be whispered by the Spirit in the ear of a rebel sinner, and the curtains which obscured his sin from his eye, drawn open, that he may see what a nest of devils he has, what astonishment will it raise in him! how will he stand amazed at his folly! how will he loathe that self, which he before so vehemently loved?

When the word like fire, and the heart like tinder come close together, the heart catches the spark and burns.

The word seems to have an active force upon the will, though the manner of it be very hard to conceive. It is operative in the hand of God for sanctification; the petition of our Saviour, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," John xvii. 17, seems to intimate more than a bare objective relation to this work; it both shows us our spots and cleanses them. It is a seed; seed, though

small, is active; no part of the plant retains a greater efficacy, all the glory and strength of the plant in its bud, blossoms, and fruit are hidden in it; the word is this seed, which being settled in the heart, by the power of the Spirit, brings forth this new creature. It is a glass that not only represents the image of God, but by the Spirit changes us into it, 2 Cor. iii. 18. A sword that pierceth the heart, Heb. iv. 12; yea, sharper than a two-edged sword, dividing asunder the soul and spirit; it is a fire to burn. The Spirit does so edge the word, that it cuts to the quick, discerns the very thoughts, insinuates into the depths of the heart, and rakes up the small sands from the bottom, as a fierce wind does from the bowels of the sea. It is God's ordinance to batter down strong holds; though it be not a natural instrument to work necessarily, yet it is likened to natural instruments, which are active under the efficiency of the agent which manages them; and this, also, in the hand of the Spirit, works mighty effects. So that the word is mighty in operation as well as clear in representation; for an activity seems to be ascribed to it by the scripture metaphors. The chief activity of it is seen in the likeness which it produces in the soul to itself. Seeds have an efficacious virtue to produce plants of the same kind with that whose seeds they are, so that the word produces qualities in the heart like

itself. The law in the heart, is the law in the word transcribed in the soul; a graft which changes a crabbed stock into a sweet tree, Jas. i. 1, 2; like a seal, it leaves a likeness and impression of itself; it works a likeness to God as he is revealed in the gospel; for we are changed into the same image;—what image? The same image which we behold in that glass, 2 Cor. iii. 18, not his essential image, but the image of his glory, represented in the gospel for our imitation. The word is the glory of God in a glass, and imprints the image of the glory of God in the heart. It is a softening word, and produces a mollified heart; an enlightening word, and causes an enlightened soul; a divine word, and engenders a divine nature: it is a spiritual word and produces a spiritual frame; as it is God's will, it subdues our will; it is a sanctifying truth, and so makes a sink of sin to become the habitation of Christ. To conclude, this is certain, the promise in the word breeds principles in the heart suitable to itself; it shows God a father, and raises up principles of love and reverence; it shows Christ a mediator, and raises up principles of faith and desire. Christ in the word, conceives Christ in the heart; Christ in the word, the beginning of grace, conceives Christ in the soul, the hope of glory.—*Charnock on the Instrument of Regeneration.*

The gospel has, in every age, proved the power of God unto salvation. It was by the preaching of it that three thousand were converted on the day of Pentecost, and myriads were afterwards induced to renounce Judaism and heathenism, and to embrace the religion of Christ with the full consent of their hearts.

These things, I think, cannot be accounted for, but by the Scripture doctrine of grace, which operates according to its sovereign will; for if the word possessed a power in itself to convert the soul, we might expect the change to be accomplished in every case where the means were used with equal diligence, and the effect to be the greatest in those who were predisposed by the superior cultivation of their faculties. Upon no other principle can we explain other facts in the history of religion; as that the word of God should at last engage the serious attention of a person who had for a long series of years discovered the utmost indifference to it; and that it should make a sudden impression, like a flash of lightning betokened by no appearance of the sky, but an impression which ever after remains. It is evident that now the time of gracious visitation is come. The man is the same as he ever was; and the truths are the same which he has repeatedly heard; but a new power attends them, by which his attention is arrested and his mind is convinced. While the word was

left to work by its own power, it effected nothing; but now it proves mighty through God, and brings every thought into captivity to Christ.

When Paul preached to the women of Philippi, who were assembled for prayer, they all heard; but of one the historian says,—"A certain woman named Lydia heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul." Acts xvi. 14. And this is a true account of every conversion. The change is secretly effected, by the Spirit of God concurring with the word. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase. 1 Cor. iii. 17.—*Dick's Theology, vol. 2, p. 339, 351, 352.*

But the immutable and everlasting God has condescended to multiply those favours upon us as Christians, which should bind our souls to him in the bonds of unchangeable love, for *of his own* sovereign *will he impregnated* us with the powerful *word* of his divine and evangelical *truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures*, more excellent than others and in a peculiar manner separated and consecrated to him from the rest of mankind. Let us be conscious of the honour he has hereby done us, and take heed we do not sacrilegiously alienate ourselves from his service.—*Doddridge on James* i. 18.

We who believe, have a most eminent and endearing demonstration, that the best of all blessings we derive from him; as it is not from any wisdom or power, worthiness, or merit in us, but merely of his own good will, and sovereign pleasure, *according to his abundant mercy*, that he has regenerated and begotten us to a lively hope of an everlasting inheritance (Job i. 13: 1 Pet. i. 3, 4,) by means of the gospel which is his true and faithful word, and is rendered efficacious in the hand of the Spirit, for producing the new birth and all the holiness and happiness which ensue upon it. See 1 Cor. iv. 15, and 1 Pet. i. 23.—*Guise on James* i. 18.

This comfort which we have by the word is the quickening and life of the soul. The life of our soul is first received by the word, and still maintained by the same word; "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." James i. 18. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."—*Manton on* 119*th Psalm.*

Only those however can apply the comfort of the word, who have felt its quickening power. When dead in sin, it quickened us, James i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23. When sunk in trouble it revived us, verses 81, 82, not however, by any innate power of its own, but by the exhibition of the

Saviour, as the spring of life and consolation.—*Bridges on 119th Psalm.*

The word hath a heart turning, a soul converting efficacy in it. It is a regenerating, as well as convincing word. 1 Pet. i. 23; 1 Thes. i. 9. The law wounds, the gospel cures, the law discovers the evil that is in sin, and the misery that follows it; and the Spirit of God, working in fellowship with the word, effectually turns the heart from sin. And thus we see in what glorious acts the efficacy of the word discovers itself upon the hearts of men; and all these acts lie in order to each other: for, until the soul be awakened, it cannot be enlightened, Eph. v. 14. Till it be enlightened, it cannot be convinced, Eph. v. 15. Conviction being nothing else but the application of the light that shines in the mind to the conscience of a sinner: till it be convinced it cannot be wounded for sin, Acts xi. 37; and until it be wounded for sin, it will never be converted from sin, and brought effectually to Jesus Christ. And thus we see what the power of the word is. And it is most certain, that it is not a power inherent in itself, nor derived from the instrument by which it is managed, but from the Spirit of the Lord, who communicates to it all that power and efficacy which it hath upon our souls. Its power is not in or from itself: it works not in a *physical way*, as

natural agents do; for then the effect would always follow, except it were miraculously hindered. But this spiritual efficacy is in the word, as the healing virtue was in the waters of Bethesda. John v. 4. "An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water. Whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stept in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." It is not a power naturally inherent in it at all times, but communicated to it at some special seasons. How often is the word preached, and no man awakened or convinced by it. If you say, Whence then hath the word all this power? Our answer is, It derives it all from the Spirit of God. 1 Thes. ii. 13. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe." It is a successful instrument only when it is in the hand of the Spirit, without whose influence it never did, nor can convince, convert, or save any soul. Now, the Spirit of God hath a sovereignty over three things in order to the conversion of sinners:

1. Over the word which works.
2. Over the soul wrought upon.
3. Over the time and season of working.—*Flavel*, Vol. 2. p. 297—299.

Of this new being we have these two things specified: 1. Its high original from God, Begotten again of his word: 2. That which so much commends good things, its duration. And this follows from the other: for if the principle of this be *incorruptible*, itself must be so too. The word of God is not only a living and ever abiding word in itself, but likewise in reference to this new birth and spiritual life of a Christian; and in this sense that which is here spoken of, is intended: it is therefore called, not only an abiding word, but incorruptible seed, which expressly relates to regeneration.

The word of God is so like himself, and carries so plainly the image of his power and wisdom, that where they are spoken of together, it is sometimes doubtful whether the expressions are to be referred to Himself or to His word: (as Heb. iv. 12; and so here:) but there is no hazard in referring them either way, seeing there is truth in both, and pertinency too; for they who refer them to God, affirm that they are intended for the extolling of His word, being the subject in hand, and that we may know it to be like him. But I think here that the Apostle speaks of the word; it is said to be quick or living (ζων,) in the fore-cited text, as well as in the passage before us; and the phrase, *abiding for ever*, is expressly repeated of it here in the prophet's words. And

(with respect to those learned men who apply them to God) I remember not that this *abiding for ever* is used to express God's eternity in himself. Howsoever this incorruptible seed is the living and everlasting word of the living and everlasting God, and is therefore such, because he, whose it is, is such.—*Bishop Leighton on* 1 Pet. i. 23.

To contest much, how in this regeneration He works upon the will, and renews it, is to little purpose, provided this be granted, that it is in his power to regenerate and renew a man at his pleasure; and how is it possible not to grant this, unless we will run into that error, to think that God hath made a creature too hard for him to rule, or hath willingly exempted it? And shall the works of the Almighty, especially this work, wherein most of all he glories, fail in his hand and remain imperfect? Shall there be any abortive wishes whereof God is the Father? "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?" Isa. lxvi. 9. No, no sinner so dead, but there is virtue in his hand to revive of the very stones. Though the most impenitent hearts are as stones within them, yet he "can make children to Abraham." Luke iii. 8. He can dig out "the heart of stone and put a heart of flesh" in its place, Ezek. xxvi. 26; otherwise, he would not have made such a promise, "Not of flesh, nor of the will of man,

but of God." John i. 13. If his sovereign will is not a sufficient principle of this regeneration, why then says the Apostle James, "Of his own will begat he us?" And he adds the subordinate cause, "By the word of truth," James i. 18, which is here called the immortal seed of the new birth.

Therefore it is that the Lord hath appointed the continuance of the ministry of this word; to the end that his church may still be faithful, bringing forth sons unto him; that the assemblies of his people may be like "flocks of sheep coming up from the washing, none barren amongst them." Cant. iv. 2.

But though this word cannot beget without Him, yet it is by this word that He begets, and ordinarily not without. It is true that the substantial Eternal word is to us (as we said) the spring of this new birth and life, the head from whom the spirits of the supernatural life, flow; but that by *the word* here is meant the gospel, the Apostle puts out of doubt, *verse* the last, "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Therefore, thus is this word really the seed of this new birth, because it contains and declares that other word, the Son of God as our life. The word is spoken in common, and so is the same to all hearers; but then all hearts being naturally shut against it, God doth by his own hand open some to receive it, and mixes it with faith;

and those it renews, and restoreth in them the image of God, draws the traces of it anew, and makes them the sons of God. "My doctrine shall drop as the dew" says Moses. Deut. xxxii. 2. The word, as a heavenly dew, not falling, but dropped into the heart by God's own Spirit, makes it all become spiritual and heavenly, and turns unto one of those drops of dew to which the children of God are compared to, Psalm cx. 3. "Thou hast the dew of thy youth."

The natural estate of the soul is darkness, and the word as a Divine light shining into it, transforms the soul into its own nature; so that as the word is called light, so is the soul that is renewed by it, "Ye were darkness, but now are ye not only enlightened, but light in the Lord." Eph. v. 8. All the evils of the natural mind are often comprised under the name darkness and error, and therefore is the whole work of conversion likewise signified by light and truth: "He begat us by the word of truth." James i. 18. So 2 Cor. iv. 16, alluding to the first *fiat lux*, or "Let there be light," in the creation. The word brought within the soul by the Spirit, lets it see its own necessity and Christ's sufficiency, convinceth it thoroughly, and causeth it to cast over itself upon him for life; and this is the very begetting of it again to eternal life.—*Leighton on* 1 Pet. i. 25.

Now follows an account of the great *means* or *instrument* by which all this should be effected, how the kingdom of Christ under the New Testament should be erected: *The Law shall go out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.* It is a law which is the great instrument of gathering the nations into the bosom of the church: *All nations shall flow into it, for the law shall go out of Zion.* And this is not effected by the law of commandments, but by the gospel only. Indeed, the law of commandments is the instrument of conviction, and "was added because of transgression." But it is the gospel that is the great instrument of conversion, Rom. x. 17: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, *even* the gospel of our salvation." This is the rod of Christ's strength, which he sends out of Zion, and by swaying of which he brings in armies of volunteers, "like the drops of the dew from the womb of the morning."—*Sermon of E. Erskine on* Isa. xi. 3.

The sound of the great trumpet is a sound of life to dead sinners, for rousing and awakening the dead; and blessed are they that are awakened and quickened with the sound of it; for the voice of it is, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Eph. v. 4. No trumpet but that of the living and life-giving God can

sound after this manner; and it is like himself; for he is the God that quickens the dead; and calls things that be not, as though they were. Rom. iv. 17.—*Sermon by R. Erskine, entitled the Great Trumpet of the everlasting Gospel.*

Concerning this hearing of the voice of the Son of God, we offer the following remarks.

1. The voice of man strikes the ear with an external sound; but the voice of the Son of God strikes the heart with an internal efficacy and energy. To hear the voice of the Son of God, then, is not only a hearing with the ear, but a believing with the heart: "the dead shall hear, and they that hear shall live."

2. All that hear shall live; but, indeed, all that are dead will not hear: for many have ears and hear not; and hearing they do not hear in the sense I have explained; but, "All that the Father hath given me," says Christ, "shall come unto me;" all whose ears God bores and opens, to take up the voice of his Son Jesus Christ, which quickens them.

3. Yea, Christ here distinctly commends and extols a twofold grace and virtue of his voice; the dead shall hear the voice; and it being heard they shall live. It is no less preternatural for the dead to hear, than it is for the dead to live; it is equally above nature to effectuate the one as the other; but it points out the method of the application of

divine grace, and the order of the Spirit's operation. Sovereign efficacious grace, makes first the dead to hear the voice of the Son of God, and then the hearer shall live: the Almighty hand of God first bores the ear of the soul; and then by the bored ear, lets in life to it.

4. But these are the secret effects of divine power; the Lord speaks as he did to Isaiah viii. 1. "With a strong hand," making the voice sound to the centre of the soul. What is spoken only to the ear, dies on the ear; but this still voice of the Spirit makes its entrance by secret passages into the heart, on which it leaves a stamp and impress of God. Others hear the sound of words and syllables as well as they; but they do not hear the voice of the Son of God, touching and reaching, catching, quickening, and captivating their whole soul.—*The happy hour of Christ's quickening voice, by Ralph Erskine.*

But the Lord powerfully works this faith in the souls of his own elect. The gospel comes unto them, *not in word only, but also in power.*

It finds them in a state of nature; but is blessed for bringing them into a state of grace. —*Gib on the Covenants.*

The Spirit makes use of the word as an ef-

fectual means of convincing and converting sinners. 1 Cor. xiv. 14: Acts xxvi. 18.

*Fisher's Catechism.*

The work of saving conversion, is not effected by the word without the Spirit, nor by the Spirit without the word.

The Holy Spirit not only gives us a power of believing and walking in the path of duty; but he gives the very act work or walk itself. Phil. i. 29; ii. 13. Zech. x. 12.

Yet it does not follow that the Holy Spirit in this work acts upon man as a stock or stone; because he does not act without the word, nor otherwise than in opening the understanding to understand the word and determining the will to receive it. "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"—*Dr. Anderson's Letters to Bellamy, page* 230, 231.

The outward call proves an effectual call only in those cases where the Spirit of God enters the heart along with it, "working in us both to will and to do, and the work of faith with power." But the word, in itself ineffectual, becomes a powerful weapon in the hand of the Spirit. When this divine and almighty agent, whose office it is to take of the things which are Christ's and show them to our souls, works, there is success in the foulest and hardest hearts; and without his influence the

most probable means fail. Hence he is styled "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ." Eph. i. 17. This distinction between the outward call and that which is effectual, is clearly marked in the words of Paul to the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." 1 Thes. i. 5.—*Sermon by Dr. Shaw on the Gospel Call.*

# APPENDIX.

## ADDRESS TO THE MEMBERS AND HEARERS BELONGING TO THE AUTHOR'S PASTORAL CHARGE.

BELOVED BRETHREN,—

This little book is placed in your hands for the following reasons:—

1. The important doctrine it teaches has been assailed among you.

2. I know I must give an account to God for the manner in which I discharge the office of the holy ministry. The commission which was given to the prophet Ezekiel, not to notice other similar passages, contains at once the arduous duty and awful responsibility of the gospel ministry. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me," &c.* It appears, then, that the ministers of religion have cause to fear the wrath of the Almighty, should they

* Chap. iii. 17—21.

fail either through the fear of man, or love of ease, or worldly interest to warn the people of their charge against every approaching danger.

3. As an expression of my gratitude for the candour and forbearance with which you have received my imperfect labours—for your grave and diligent attendance upon gospel ordinances since my settlement among you, and for the generous temporal support you have given me, through many heavy trials and discouragements.

4. The present may be the last opportunity afforded me to express my many obligations to you; which can be done in no better way, than by bearing a faithful testimony to that precious truth, which is revealed in the gospel of the grace of God, as the sure foundation of our faith and hope. Present time, only, is ours.

5. To supply the Lord's people with additional assistance in the study of the scriptures. So far as known to me, no separate treatise has been given to the church, designed so fully to explain the Nature of Regeneration, and to *prove the instrumentality of the word of truth in its production in the soul.* But you will here

find the substance of the arguments on which the doctrine rests, drawn from the scriptures of truth.

6. Because the sum of true religion consists in being transformed into the holy image of God; of which regeneration is the first step. It is that eternal life revealed in the scriptures and begun in its principle, in opposition to all creature holiness, and all mere external worship. It is entirely the work of God in opposition to all the different religions of men. Hence we find, that those who trust in "rites and ceremonies, merits, pardons for money, praying to saints, conjuring spirits, crossings, sprinkling with holy water," &c., persecute this true religion; malign the character of its professors, destroy their bodies when they have the power, and blasphemously burn that blessed book in which God has revealed it to men. Remember, then, my beloved brethren, that no attainments in knowledge, no regard to the externals of religion, no macerations of body—no sacrifices which you may or can make will admit you into heaven.—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

7. That you may be comforted and supported by the love of God in those trials which are incident to your passage through this present evil world. In the regenerating act, the love of God is first shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost; by which you are brought to love God, and all who bear his image; you have communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; and spiritual, if not visible, communion with all the saints. But such is your remaining imperfection; such the injustice of men, arising from corrupt nature; and so great the evils of the world which you are called to encounter in the service of God, that you may enjoy but little *sensible* communion with God,—and but little comfortable fellowship with his people. Thus your grief and sorrow of heart may cause you to water your couch with tears, and forget your accustomed food. But let your joys also abound, for the image of God upon your souls is indestructible and immortal,—the love of God is eternal; and in a little time shall your love to God and to one another, be made perfect, when all the saints meet in glory, "when none but saints shall be there, and saints made perfect. O

blessed state! How much surpassing the best below! O amiable and excellent grace of love! How much does it exceed the most valuable gift, when it outshines every grace, and is the everlasting consummation of them! When faith and hope are at an end, love will burn for ever with the brightest flame."* "Now abideth faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is LOVE."

Finally, I bring you no new doctrine; it is the doctrine of the Bible, of your subordinate standards, of your former pastors, that you will find exhibited in these pages. The Rev. Joseph Shaw, LL. D. whose mortal remains now rest in front of your place of worship, bore a full and explicit testimony to the important doctrine, that the Spirit of God employs the word of truth in the regeneration of his people. His testimony to this truth is found in the last sermon of his life,—the last message of mercy which he was permitted to bring to you, in the great name of our common Lord and Master, whom he so faithfully served.

* S. Brown, on 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

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